BBC

TUDOR ENGLAND'S 'ANGELS OF DEATH'

The 16th-century obsession with female killers

HISTORY MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
April 2025 / www.historyextra.com

THE FINAL MYSTERY OF RICHARD III

How 21st-century science cracked a 500-year-old cold case

Liquor, loot and death on the high seas

A hell-raising history of piracy

Was Charles I *really* a tyrant?

HISTORY'S FIRST BLACK SUPERSTAR

Josephine Baker's extraordinary life as a singer, dancer – and spy

STORIES OF THE
SECOND WORLD
WAR

THE ROYAL MINT®
THE ORIGINAL MAKER

STORIES OF
WWII

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Service

During the Second World War, the people of Britain and the Commonwealth fought valiantly as millions of ordinary citizens were thrust into one of history's most devastating conflicts. As we mark the 80th anniversary of the war's conclusion, this Stories of the Second World War 2025 UK Coin commemorates the indomitable spirit shown by these people during this dark period of their lives by retelling some of their incredible stories and experiences.

Scan the Code

royalmint.com

IWM
IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS

WELCOME APRIL 2025

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

"Ten years ago, on 26 March 2015, an English king was buried in a cathedral. What made this event particularly unusual was that the king had died more than 500 years ago, and had been residing under a car park in Leicester until very recently. I'm referring, of course, to **Richard III**, whose rediscovery in 2012 is arguably the greatest history news story of this century. But how could we be sure that this skeleton did indeed belong to the Yorkist king? To provide an answer, the latest scientific techniques were employed, as recounted in this month's cover feature. It's written by Turi King, who led the DNA verification process that ensured the correct man would be laid to rest in Leicester Cathedral. Turn to page 22 for the full inside story.

Richard III's reign famously ended in ignominy, as did that of a second king under the spotlight this month: **Charles I**. On the 400th anniversary of the beginning of Charles's reign, we've asked the historian Jonathan Healey to consider whether the Stuart king's enemies were justified in describing him as a "tyrant". You'll find his assessment in our Thinkpiece on page 53.

To conclude on a more positive note, this issue we're also revisiting the life of **Josephine Baker**, who has been described as "the first black superstar", and who died 50 years ago this month. She's probably still best known as an entertainer, but, as Anna Maria Barry shows in her article on page 62, Baker also had crucial roles to play in the Second World War and the civil rights struggle.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Time for bed
In Sophie Nibbs's feature on historical pirates, I was surprised to learn that some of them followed strict rules, including having an 8pm curfew on the ship (page 60).

2. Mum's not the word
Mothering Sunday will soon be upon us and I hadn't previously realised that this began as a day when Christians would return to their 'mother church', rather than celebrate their own mums (page 85).

3. Ancient Rock-star
In this month's *Anniversaries*, I was intrigued to discover that Gibraltar takes its name from Tariq ibn Ziyad, a governor of Tangier who conquered the promontory in the eighth century (page 6).

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Jonathan Healey
"The Civil Wars are endlessly fascinating and full of remarkable characters. I'm working on a book that tells the epic tale of how war came in 1642, and the people who drove the crisis or tried to stop it."
Jonathan explores the reign of Charles I on page 53

Hallie Rubenhold
"I believe that historical true crime can offer a lens through which we can look at a particular moment in time. As a social historian, that's priceless."
Hallie reveals what the Dr Crippen murder case can tell us about life in the early 20th century on page 70

Tim Grady
"Societies are very good at commemorating their own wartime losses. It is remarkable to think, therefore, that the enemy dead were also once included in many local remembrance events."
Tim considers the fate of Germans and Britons who died on enemy soil in the two world wars on page 46

Turi King
"Ten years on, I confess I still have to pinch myself that I was even involved in the project to identify the remains of Richard III. I'm still so proud of all that was achieved."
Turi gives us the inside story of how science cracked a 500-year-old royal mystery on page 22

Contact us
PHONE
Subscriptions & back issues
03330 162115
Editorial 0117 300 8699
EMAIL
Subscriptions & back issues
www.buysubscriptions.com/contactus
Editorial historymagazine@historyextra.com
POST
Subscriptions & back issues
BBC History Magazine, PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge, Northampton, NN4 7BF. Basic annual subscription rates: UK: £90.87, EU overseas: €120, USA: $168.87, AUS/NZ: AU$180 ROW: $136
In the **US/Canada**: NPS Media Group 74 Winthrop St. Suite #6, Augusta, ME 04330; buysubscriptions.com/contactus; Toll-free 888-941-5623

ON THE COVER: RICHARD III OF ENGLAND, C.1520: ALAMY. DNA MOLECULAR STRUCTURE: GETTY IMAGES. STRAND DNA: SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY. THIS PAGE: JENI NOTT/BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/JOHNNY RING

CONTENTS

APRIL 2025

FEATURES

22 Richard III's final mystery
Turi King reveals how science proved the identity of the king in the car park

30 Firebrand abolitionist
Ryan Hanley tells the amazing story of the outspoken 19th-century activist Robert Wedderburn

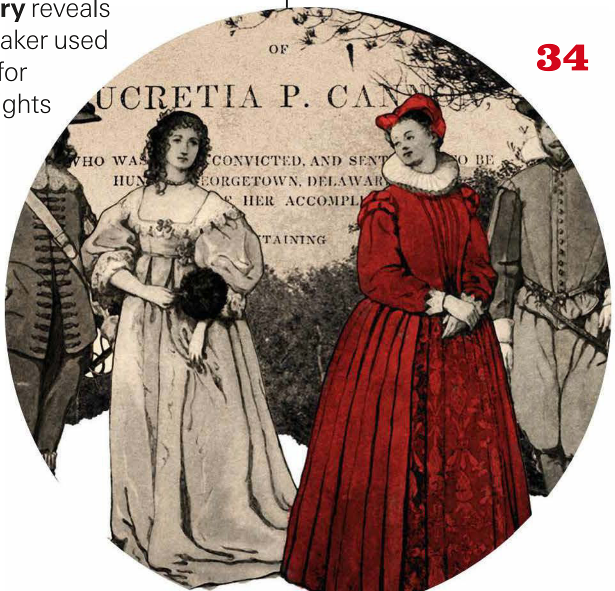
34 Tudor 'angels of death'
Blessin Adams explores the early modern fascination with women who committed violent crimes

46 What to do with the dead?
Tim Grady explains what the treatment of German and British dead following the two world wars reveals about the two nations' ongoing relationship

53 Was Charles I a tyrant?
Jonathan Healey asks if the Stuart king deserves his poor reputation

60 Liquor, loot and death on the high seas
Sophie Nibbs shares five little-known facts about pirates

62 History's first black superstar
Anna Maria Barry reveals how Josephine Baker used her fame to fight for France and civil rights



EVERY MONTH

6 **Anniversaries**

The Conversation

11 The new president of the Royal Historical Society discusses the challenges facing history in 2025
17 **Michael Wood** on epic medieval Chinese voyages of discovery
18 **Hidden Histories**

20 **Letters**
40 **Q&A** History questions answered

Books

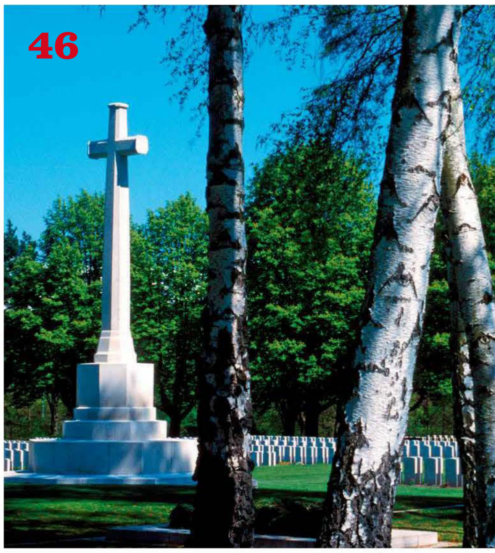
70 **Interview:** Hallie Rubenhold discusses the crimes, capture and infamy of Dr Crippen
74 New history **books reviewed**

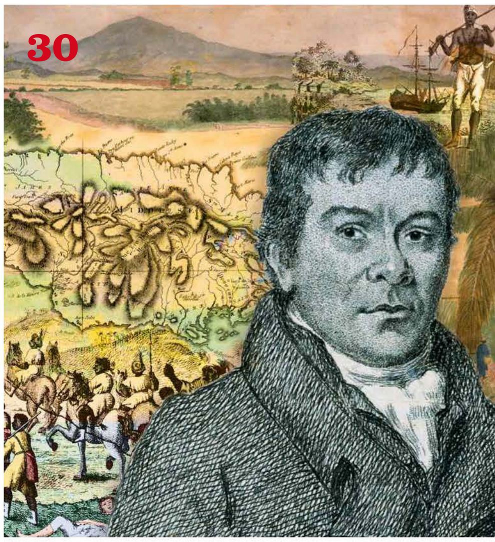
Encounters

80 **Diary:** Things to see and do this month
85 **Recipe:** Simnel cake
86 **Historic Cities:** Beijing

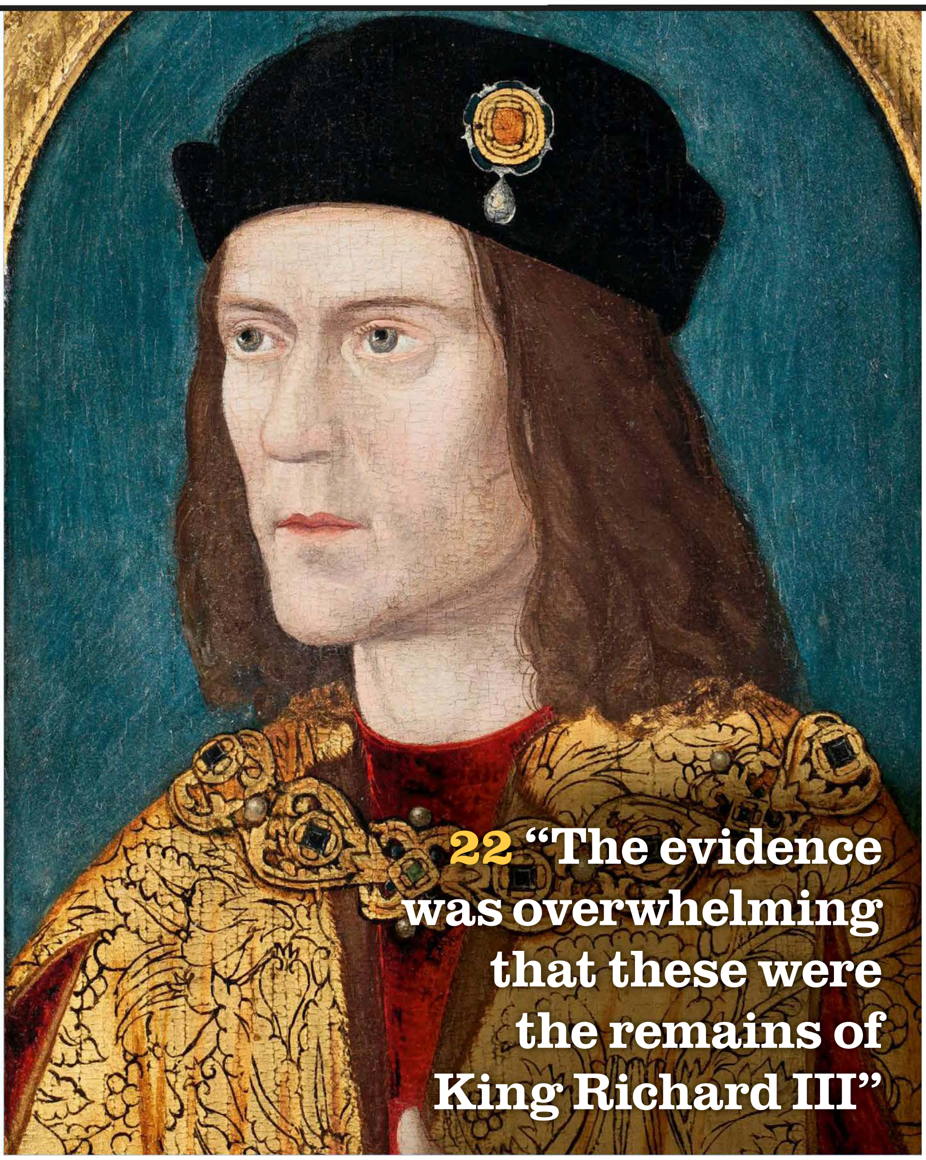
88 **Prize crossword**

90 **My history hero**
James Coomarasamy chooses Andrei Sakharov

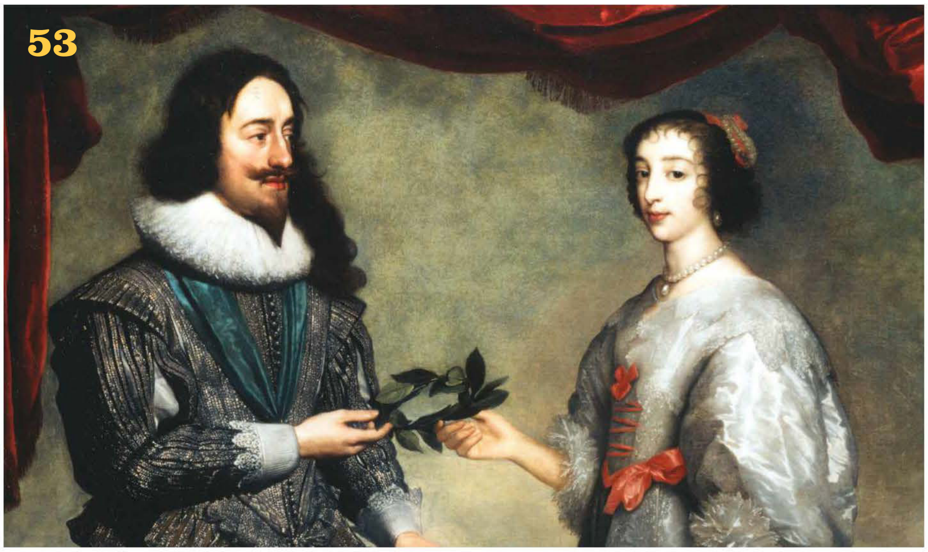




60



22 "The evidence was overwhelming that these were the remains of King Richard III"



53

ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/ BRIDGEMAN/TOPFOTO

MORE FROM US

SUBSCRIBE

SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY

See page 44 for details

HISTORY
Children of the Blitz
HISTORY
The triumph of the Anglo-Saxons
HISTORY
THE FINAL MYSTERY OF RICHARD III

ENGAGE

HISTORY EXTRA

historyextra.com

The website of *BBC History Magazine* is filled with exciting content on British and world history, and includes an extensive archive of magazine content.

Social media

𝕏@historyextra historyextra @historyextra

LISTEN

HISTORY EXTRA PODCAST

Our award-winning podcast is released six times a week. Why not check it out today, and explore our archive of more than 2,000 previous episodes. Download episodes for free from all major podcast providers, or via **historyextra.com/podcast**

USPS Identification Statement BBC HISTORY (ISSN 1469-8552) (USPS 024-177) April 2025 is published 13 times a year under licence from BBC Studios by Immediate Media Company London Limited, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London W6 7BT, UK. Distributed in the US by NPS Media Group, 74 Winthrop St, Suite #6, Augusta, ME 04330. Periodicals postage paid at Augusta, ME and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE, PO Box 37495, Boone, IA 50037-0495.

ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in April in history

27 APRIL AD 711

An Islamic army lands in Gibraltar

The conquest of the Rock heralds centuries of Muslim rule in Iberia

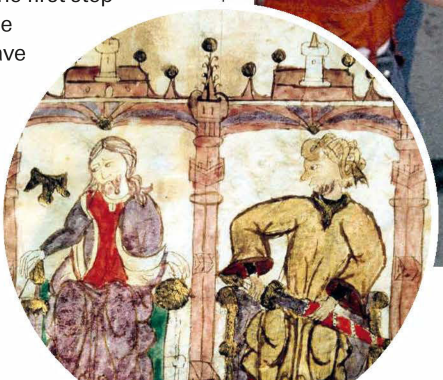
After hours at sea, a fleet of ships reached its destination – a rocky promontory stretching south into the Mediterranean. Departing from the northern shore of Africa, the ships had crossed the narrow strait separating the Maghreb from the Iberian peninsula. Merchants and armies had sailed this route for millennia, but this voyage was epoch-defining. Led by Tariq ibn Ziyad, the governor of Tangier, around 7,000 Berber and Arab troops now stepped onto foreign and very unfamiliar soil.

The invasion had been set in motion by strife within the Visigothic kingdom in Iberia. After the death of King Witiza, Roderic seized the throne, but his rule was contested. Among his foes was Count Julian, the governor of Ceuta, a once-loyal vassal. According to later accounts, his daughter had been assaulted in Roderic's court – and now, seeking revenge, Julian turned to the powerful Umayyad Caliphate, an Islamic empire that stretched from the Indus to the Atlantic.

Julian may have offered Musa ibn Nusayr, governor of Ifriqiya, ships and intelligence to facilitate an invasion. A reconnaissance raid in AD 710 confirmed Iberia's vulnerability and its many splendours.

The following April, as Tariq's men waded ashore, they beheld a towering limestone ridge. Known to the ancient Greeks as one of the 'Pillars of Hercules', it had long marked the edge of the Mediterranean world. Now it was given a new name: Jabal Tariq (later becoming Gibraltar), 'mountain of Tariq'.

Months later, the Umayyad army crushed Roderic's forces at the battle of Guadalete – a clash that heralded the collapse of Visigothic Iberia. Tariq's landing proved to be the first step in a transformation that reshaped the region for centuries to come, and gave rise to al-Andalus.



Roderic (left), last Visigothic king of Iberia, with Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Islamic leader who defeated him in AD 711, shown in a 15th-century manuscript

The Apollo 13 command module is retrieved from the Pacific after the near-catastrophic mission ended with three Nasa astronauts returning safely to Earth

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

John Milton, pictured c1660. By this time he had lost his sight, so dictated *Paradise Lost* to a scribe

27 APRIL 1667

Blind and impoverished, **John Milton sells *Paradise Lost* to a printer for an initial £5,** with another £5 to be paid once sales reach an agreed number. The most authoritative 12-book version is published seven years later.

13 APRIL 1970

Apollo 13 faces catastrophe

The lives of three astronauts hang in the balance during their ill-fated lunar mission

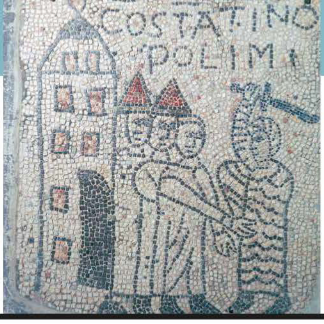
Almost 56 hours into their planned journey to the moon aboard Apollo 13, astronauts Jim Lovell, Fred Haise and Jack Swigert heard a loud bang throughout the spacecraft. Swigert then radioed the now-infamous words back to Earth: "Okay, Houston, we've had a problem here."

An oxygen tank in the service module had exploded, compromising the spacecraft and throwing into jeopardy the mission to land on the lunar surface. The command module, *Odyssey*, lost power and the crew were forced to take refuge in the lunar module *Aquarius* – built to accommodate only two people, but now acting as a lifeboat for three.

Nasa's third mission to land humans on the moon suddenly turned into a desperate fight for survival. With carbon dioxide levels rising, engineers on Earth devised a makeshift CO_2 'scrubber' to absorb the gas using duct tape, plastic bags and material from the damaged spacecraft. It worked. Nevertheless, water and power were running dangerously low. Water was rationed to 6 ounces (around 200ml) each per day, and all non-essential systems were shut down. Temperatures inside the module plunged to 3°C.

Apollo 13 had to use the moon's gravity to 'slingshot' around the satellite and set a trajectory for Earth. As the craft sped into the moon's shadow, radio contact was lost. The crew set a record (which still stands today) for the greatest distance from Earth that humans have travelled.

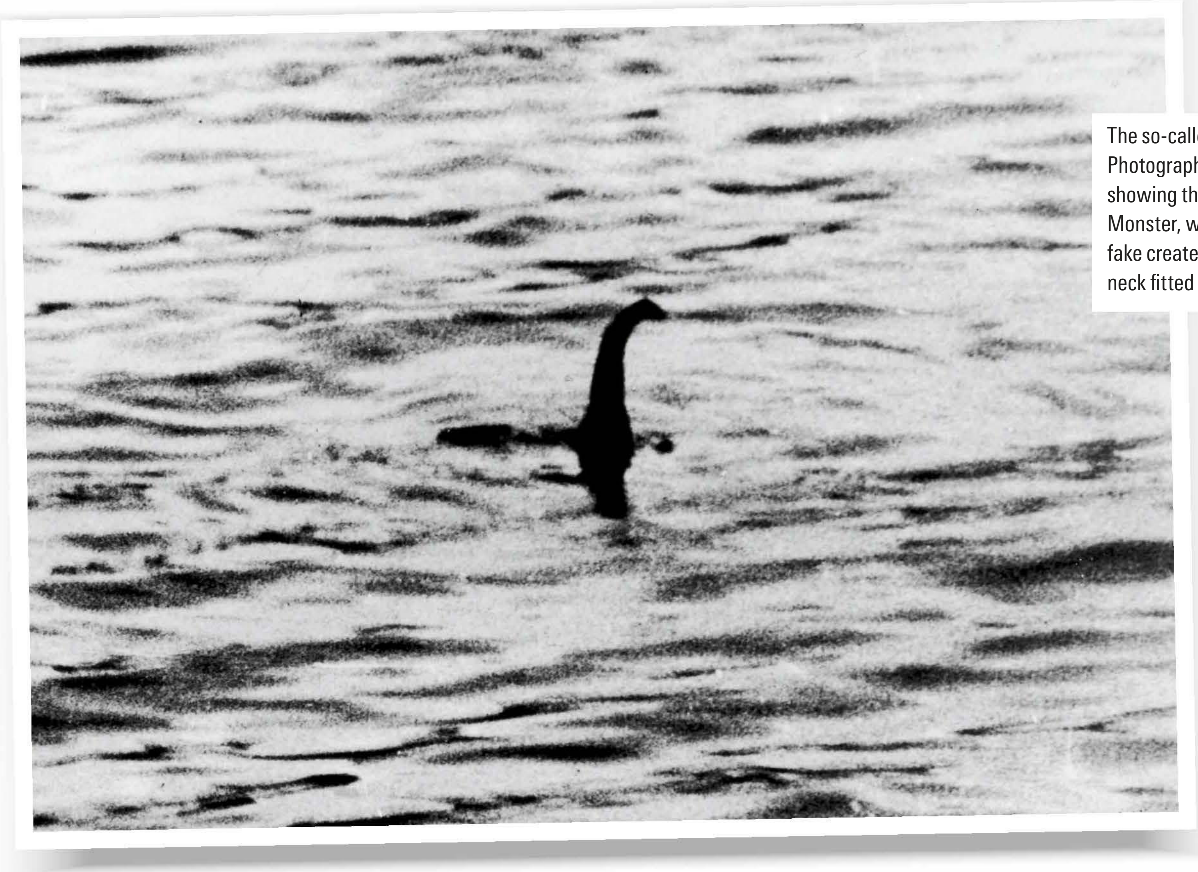
On 17 April, four harrowing days after the explosion, Apollo 13 re-entered Earth's atmosphere. A tense radio blackout followed – then parachutes deployed and *Odyssey* splashed down safely in the Pacific Ocean off Samoa. Having followed the ordeal with bated breath, people around the world cheered. Nasa deemed the mission a "successful failure": Apollo 13 didn't reach the moon – but, against seemingly impossible odds, the three astronauts returned home alive.



The sack of Constantinople, depicted in a mosaic created just a few years after that crusader attack

12 APRIL 1204

Crusaders sack Constantinople, looting treasures and desecrating churches. They overthrow Byzantine rule, establishing a feudal state known as the Latin empire. The wider Byzantine empire collapses temporarily; some splinter states survive, with other territories claimed by crusaders.



The so-called 'Surgeon's Photograph', purportedly showing the Loch Ness Monster, was exposed as a fake created using a sculpted neck fitted to a toy submarine

21 APRIL 1934

A photo of the Loch Ness Monster is published… or is it?

The 'Surgeon's Photograph' fuels a media frenzy

On a spring day in 1934, a man stood at the edge of Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands, his hands steady as he lifted his camera. The water was eerily still, save for gentle ripples lapping against the shore. Then something broke the surface and a long, sinuous neck stretched up from the depths.

Heart pounding, the photographer clicked the shutter. Of the few images he snapped, only one captured the inexplicable. Days later, that one tantalising picture became the most famous 'proof' of the fabled Loch Ness Monster's existence.

When the *Daily Mail* published the grainy black-and-white picture on 21 April, it created a sensation. The photographer, identified only as a "London surgeon", wished to remain anonymous, adding an air of credibility. The man behind the lens was Robert Kenneth Wilson, a gynaecologist with no particular ties to Loch Ness. He claimed to have taken the picture by chance, fate having granted him a fleeting glimpse of the legendary creature. His reluctance to attach his name to the photograph only fuelled the media frenzy.

The legend of the Loch Ness Monster had been simmering for many centuries. The first whispered tales date back as far as AD 565, when Saint Columba supposedly encountered a fearsome beast in the loch. But it was only during the modern era that Nessie became a global obsession.

In 1933, the phenomenon reached fever pitch with a spate of sightings. That summer, while driving alongside the loch, George Spicer and his wife claimed to have seen "the nearest approach to a dragon or prehistoric animal" crossing the road in front of them. Their testimony echoed other incidents in which people reportedly came face to face with an enormous animal.

The *Daily Mail* even hired big-game hunter Marmaduke Wetherell to track down the beast – but he was humiliated when footprints he discovered were exposed as fakes, created by a prankster (possibly Wetherell himself) using a stuffed hippopotamus foot. It was amid this furore that Wilson's photograph came into the newspaper's possession.

For 60 years, the 'Surgeon's Photograph' teased the possibility of Nessie's existence. But in 1994, the truth emerged. Christian Spurling, Wetherell's son-in-law (or possibly stepson), confessed that it had all been an elaborate hoax intended as payback for the tabloid. The 'monster' was merely a toy submarine with a sculpted neck attached, placed in the loch to create a convincing shot.

Wilson was a friend of Wetherell's, chosen to provide the ruse with a degree of credibility. And so, much to the chagrin of cryptozoologists worldwide, one of history's greatest hoaxes unravelled.

GETTY IMAGES

A soldier raises the Spanish flag in April 1931 after the deposition of Alfonso XIII had established the Second Spanish Republic

14 APRIL 1931

The Second Spanish Republic is declared following municipal elections. The monarchy falls and King Alfonso XIII flees the country. Many citizens celebrate the establishment of a democratic republic, which marks a new political chapter in the country.

A
Map of
LEWIS AND CLARKS TRACK,
Across the Western Portion of
North America

This 1814 map shows the route of the pioneering Lewis and Clark expedition, aided by the young Shoshone guide and translator Sacagawea, who is depicted here in a modern statue

7 APRIL 1805

Sacagawea helps forge a path of discovery

An Indigenous teenager accompanies Lewis and Clark across America

On 7 April 1805, the young Shoshone woman Sacagawea set out with Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on a perilous journey west through the United States' enormous Louisiana Territory. She had been captured as a child by the Hidatsa and later sold to French-Canadian fur trapper Toussaint Charbonneau, whom she married and who also joined the party of an expedition that would make history.

When President Thomas Jefferson dispatched Lewis and Clark to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Territory, the aim of the expedition was to map the terrain, document new species and build relationships with Indigenous nations. Charbonneau joined as an interpreter – but it was Sacagawea who became invaluable.

As they paddled up the Missouri river, Sacagawea – carrying her newborn son, Jean Baptiste – helped provide directions for Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery as they traversed uncharted lands. She identified edible plants, found fresh water and helped the men survive in the unforgiving wilderness. When their boat nearly capsized, she saved crucial documents and supplies.

Her greatest contribution came when they reached the towering Rocky Mountains, which the expedition needed horses to cross. Recognising a local Shoshone chief as her long-lost brother, Cameahwait, she secured horses and safe passage.

The expedition faced treacherous rivers, bitter winters and unknown tribes. Accompanied by Sacagawea, though, they gained trust among Native nations. Her journey ended after they reached the Pacific, but her legacy endured. Without her, the mission might have failed. As it was, this young mother braved the unknown to act as pathfinder for the westward expansion of the nascent US. H

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

RIII®
KING RICHARD III
VISITOR CENTRE
10th ANNIVERSARY
KRIII.COM
MAKE YOUR VISIT PART OF HISTORY
BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW

COMPILED BY **MATT ELTON**

THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DEBATE HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES

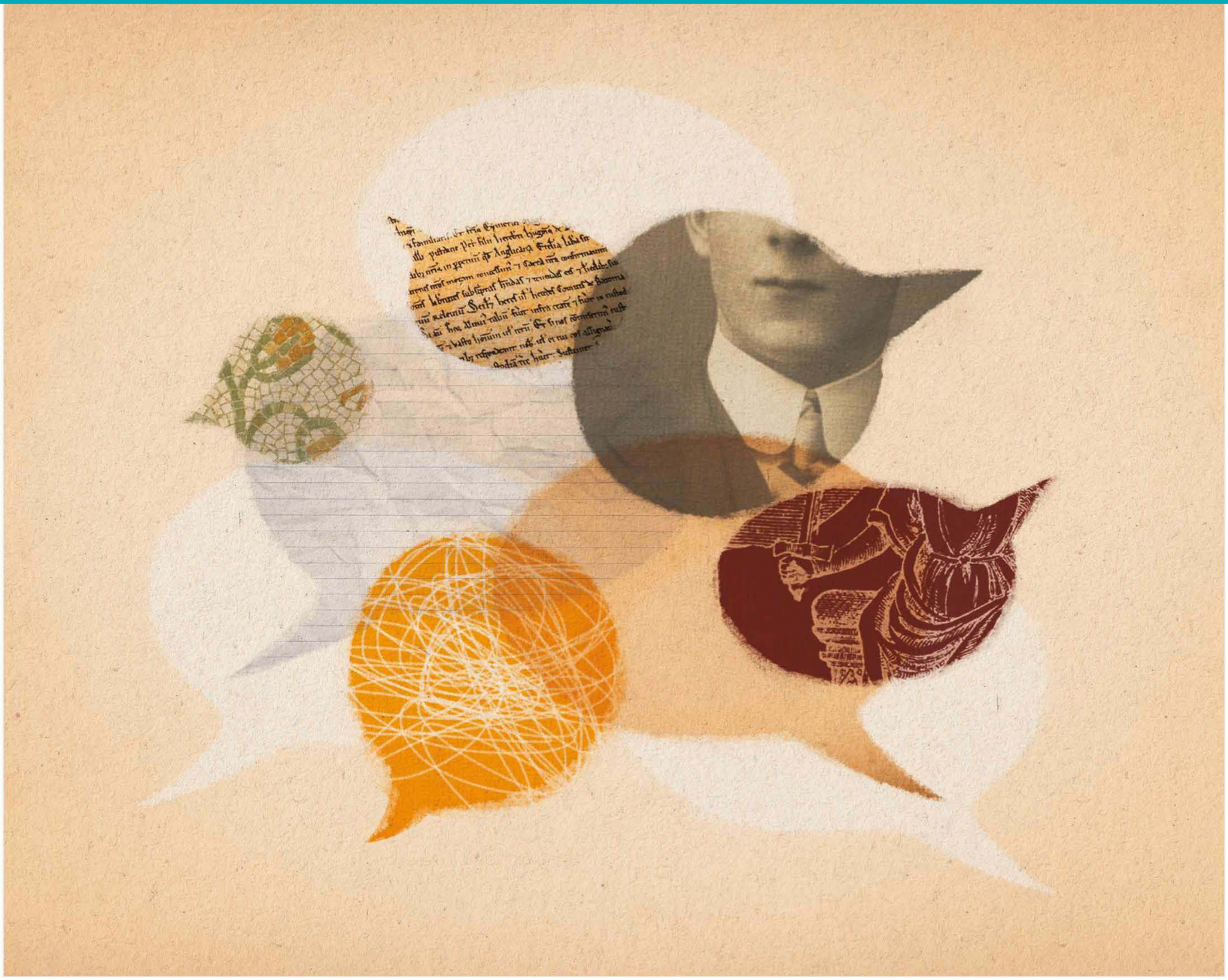


ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

THE INTERVIEW

"If the culture wars were to come to an end, historians would be delighted"

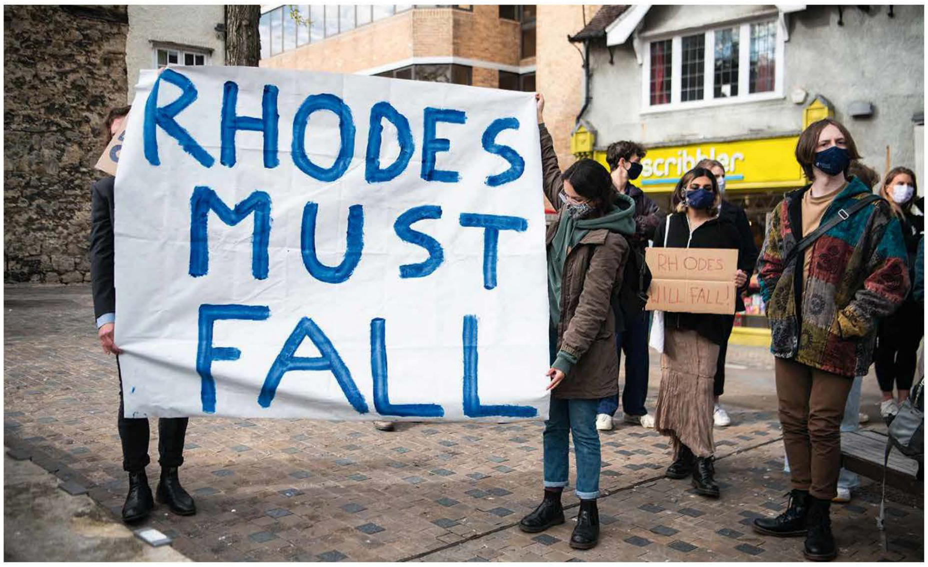
The new president of the Royal Historical Society, **LUCY NOAKES**, talks to Matt Elton about the issues facing history in Britain in 2025 – and why they will matter to the country in the years ahead

What challenges do historians face today?
Listen to this conversation with Lucy Noakes in full on our podcast soon: *historyextra.com/podcast*

Matt Elton You became president of the Royal Historical Society (RHS) in November 2024 – at what, I think it's fair to say, is an interesting moment for Britain's relationship with its past. Before looking at some of the challenges you face, can you tell us a bit about what the RHS does?
Lucy Noakes We exist to support historians and to promote history as a subject and as a wider topic of interest among the public. We run public events throughout the year – lectures, talks and discussions – that can be joined in person and via our website. And we have a range of different grants and awards that we hand out to history practitioners at all stages of their careers.

But increasingly central to our work is advocating for historians and history. That's something that the founders of the RHS in the mid-19th century could surely not have imagined. To do this, we work with a range of other bodies – for example, the Historical Association, which represents teachers and the teaching of history in schools and sixth-form colleges.

When I spoke to your predecessor, Emma Griffin, in 2023, she identified university history funding and access to higher education in Britain as key areas of work for the RHS. Is that still the case, and how big is the problem in 2025?
I'm sorry to say it has only got worse. Since I became president, we have started working with two departments facing significant cuts to their programmes and, potentially, to staffing. We've also been in touch, informally, with two other departments that have asked for our support in the face of threats of cutting down degree programmes.



Calling out colonialism Protesters in Oxford call for the removal of a statue of colonial statesman Cecil Rhodes in 2021. The 'culture wars' have stymied critical thinking in history, says Lucy Noakes

> " Standing up for history is central to our work – in a way that the Victorian founders of the RHS could surely not have imagined "

Last year, the RHS published *The Value of History,* a report on the state of history in British universities. It's based on feedback from our members and fellows, rather than a quantitative survey of history in those institutions. But what it reveals is that, of the 66 departments from which people responded to the survey, 39 had seen cuts in what they'd been able to offer since 2020.

Some of that has been the result of redundancies and well-publicised cuts to programmes, but other impacts are more hidden: staff retiring or leaving and not being replaced, for instance, or departments being merged into larger ones.

Overall, the situation seems to be worse in institutions that became universities after 1992 [when former polytechnics were first able to gain university status], many of which have smaller numbers of staff and students, and sometimes – though not always – have shorter traditions of teaching history. But it's also increasingly impacting more established universities, including those in the Russell Group [a self-selected group of 24 institutions], where in some cases entire history programmes are now at risk.

Tellingly, the British Academy, which represents humanities and social sciences, published a study last year that identified 'cold spots' in the provision of Shape [Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy] subjects – places where students would have to travel at least 60km to access their chosen subject at a higher education institution. As more and more students now live at home because of the costs of going to university, it's becoming harder for some to access programmes in humanities, history and languages than it would have been a decade or so ago.

It's important to stress that history remains very popular among students. In 2024, more than 47,000 people took history A-level in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and more than 10,000 took history Highers in Scotland. In 2023 – the most recent year for which we have statistics – about 40,000 students were taking undergraduate and masters' programmes with 'history' in the course titles.

What are some of the reasons given by universities for these cuts?
It depends on which university you ask. Some of the larger Russell Group institutions – Cardiff, Durham and Newcastle, for instance – cite changes to legislation preventing overseas students from bringing family with them to the UK. [The Labour government announced in August 2024 that it did not plan to lift these restrictions, which were imposed by the previous Conservative administration earlier that year.]

Other, smaller institutions are finding that the numbers of undergraduates from the UK are falling because some of the larger, Russell Group institutions are making it easier for students to access their courses. School pupils are sometimes told – wrongly, in my view – that there's little point spending their money on going to a non-Russell Group university, which leaves courses at smaller institutions struggling.

And, of course, all of this is underpinned by the changes to the funding model introduced in 2010 by the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government. Among the changes, university fees shot up almost overnight from around £3,000 to £6,000 and, in some cases, up to £9,000. That's a huge burden for most students to carry – and yet, because universities' income has not kept pace with inflation, universities have a smaller and smaller funding pot to draw on.

What can be done to address the issue?
I honestly think that the current model

GETTY IMAGES

HITLER!
LOOK OOT
THE JOCKS ARE CO
THIR

Mobilising memories ABOVE: Scottish soldiers en route to fight in the Second World War, September 1939 LEFT: Rehearsals for WWI centenary commemorations in Manchester, 2018. Students enjoy exploring how memories of war were mobilised during Brexit debates, says Noakes

for British universities is broken. I think there needs to be a willingness among politicians and policymakers to work with university representatives on a profound rethink of how we fund and organise higher education. It might not be popular with some universities, but one thing that could be done is reintroduce the cap on student numbers for specific degree programmes at individual institutions – a restriction that was withdrawn in 2015. But it's a complex situation, and a lot of work needs to be done.

Have there been any changes since the Labour government came to power last summer?

Not as many as we would have hoped – and absolutely no movement on the kind of structural changes that, in my opinion, it's becoming increasingly apparent that British universities need. There's no way that universities are going to be able to continue acting as 'soft power' cultural ambassadors for Britain if they're starved of funds in the way that they have been and continue to be.

Having said that, there have been two changes that are, in my view, welcome. First, the door of government now feels less closed to universities and to humanities subjects, which I hope will give us more opportunity to work with policymakers.

Second, the announcement that the 'era of culture wars' of the past few years is over [promised by new culture secretary Lisa Nandy after Labour's election win in July 2024] was very welcome for historians. As any history student knows, the way we think about the past is not fixed. It's always evolving, always changing, and I think that process was adversely affected by the 'culture wars'.

It had become increasingly difficult to carry out any kind of critical thinking about history, which is a large part of what we do. I work on the experience of the two world wars, and sometimes run an undergraduate module at the University of Essex, exploring the memory of the Second World War. The students really enjoy this approach, and it leads on to thinking about how those memories were mobilised during the Covid-19 pandemic and in debates during the run-up to the 2016 Brexit vote. However, I think that such topics had become

> **"History teaching is always evolving, always changing – and I think that process had become unhelpfully politicised"**

GETTY IMAGES

Screen stories Jarvis Cocker joins Simon Schama at the BFI archives for the BBC's *Story of Us* TV series. Lucy Noakes laments the demise of history documentaries as "appointment television" in the streaming age

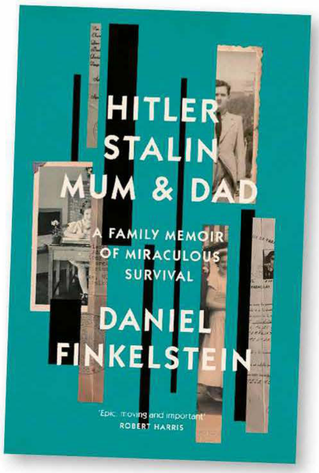
BBC

unhelpfully politicised – and that placed historians in a no-win situation.

What would you like politicians to understand about history?
I'd really like them to understand that history is a process, not something that stands still – and that critiquing existing ideas is at the very heart of historical practice. History is a living profession.

Politicians have often promoted the importance of STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] subjects in recent years. What are the arguments for studying history?
Our *Value of History* report looked at a range of data for outcomes for students on different programmes. What we found was that graduates from history programmes performed really well both in terms of their earnings and in going into what's called 'graduate employment' when compared with a range of other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and non-vocational STEM subjects.

A few years ago, here at the University of Essex, we had a great student in his 60s on our history MA programme. He had recently stepped back from the computing company that he'd founded several decades ago, and which had made him a lot of money. He came and talked to our students to explain to them that, though he had employed computer engineers to do the technical work, most of his staff were former humanities students. That was because, he argued, such students – and particularly history students – come out of their degrees with the ability to read and synthesise a large mass of material, pull out and interrogate arguments, communicate clearly and work to tight deadlines. History gives them what are often called 'core transferable skills', which are very attractive to employers.


HITLER
STALIN
MUM & DAD
A FAMILY MEMOIR OF MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL
DANIEL FINKELSTEIN
'Epic, moving and important'
ROBERT HARRIS

The success of Daniel Finkelstein's powerful 2023 memoir exploring his family's story of wartime survival demonstrates the public appetite for history

In a world of fake news and AI-generated content, do you think those skills are more vital now than ever?
I think they are. One of the core skills we teach our students is critical thinking – that to make an argument, you need to be able to support it with evidence. I would really hope that any history student seeing a story posted on social media as fact, but which is actually opinion and which doesn't link to verifiable facts, would be able to see that for what it is rather than just taking it as read.

Taking a wider view, what's your take on the current state of public history in the UK more generally?
I'm struck by the continued huge public appetite for history. People love listening to podcasts and watching television programmes such as *The Mirror and the Light*, based on the last of Hilary Mantel's fantastic novels about Thomas Cromwell. There's the popularity of memoirs such as Daniel Finkelstein's *Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad* [2023], which interweaves the story of his own family with the history of Europe in the mid-20th century. And I really enjoyed the recent BBC TV series *Simon Schama's Story of Us* – but I was struck by the fact that 20 or 30 years ago, in the pre-streaming age, it would have been appointment television.

It was a fantastic set of history documentaries, and I would urge anybody with an interest in contemporary and recent modern British history to watch it. But there were only three parts, and I think that maybe 20 years ago this would have been commissioned as a big tentpole series that would have been watched by many more people. It's difficult in an age of streaming, but I would like to see more investment in history on television.

Viewing figures Mark Rylance and Damian Lewis play Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII in the BBC adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *The Mirror and the Light* – one of many popular history-based TV shows

> **" One of the core skills we teach students is critical thinking: that to make an argument, you need to support it with evidence "**

I would also like to see a wider understanding of the fact that, without historians and historical research, there just wouldn't be any of this public history that we celebrate so much. This research is often published initially in academic monographs or journals that aren't necessarily going to be read by the wider public. It is only when they are read by figures who communicate well with the wider public that they reach a wider audience.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge that here's also a huge appetite among members of the public for researching history themselves. You can see that in the popularity of genealogical services and tools to help people research their own family histories and position themselves in the past. I became particularly aware of this during First World War centenary events between 2014 and 2018, when thousands and thousands of community groups, history groups and heritage groups across Britain, often receiving funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, produced fantastic and really valuable work.

Do universities have a role in this?

Engagement with public history is really popular among undergraduate students. Often, but not exclusively, it's post-1992 universities and newer universities that have been proactive in organising opportunities for students to work outside the classroom at historical and heritage organisations, helping to produce resources for public history.

Many people may not be aware of this work that universities often do with local communities and organisations to explore public history, which has real benefits for those communities. People involved learn transferable skills. They learn how to access and explore an archive. They gain confidence. They learn how to write up research. They might learn how to create a website or to put together a podcast. And this kind of public history engagement work is also threatened by cuts to history in universities.

What would you like the RHS to achieve in the next two years?

My wishlist would be topped by history thriving in the UK. That's got to start with investment in British universities, a rethinking of the funding structure, and a recognition of the value of history and the humanities. If we grasp that history is really popular with the public as well as with prospective students, we can start to reinvigorate history more widely across our national culture.

Lucy Noakes is president of the Royal Historical Society, and Rab Butler professor of modern history at the University of Essex

BBC/ROSIE SHERWOOD

OBITUARY

Marika Sherwood
(1937–2025)

The pioneering historian, author and campaigner Marika Sherwood was born in Hungary in 1937 to a Jewish family. As a survivor of the Holocaust, she emigrated to Australia in 1948 and then to the UK in 1965. She worked as a teacher in London during a period that saw a rise in the number of pupils from Black British Caribbean communities, and witnessed discriminatory practices such as the disproportionate placement of Black pupils in lower teaching streams. She was also keenly aware of the damaging impact of historical silences and erasures around the Black presence in Britain.

Sherwood's commitment to the research and dissemination of African diasporan history first emerged in 1982 with the publication of a book on the British Honduran Forestry Unit during the Second World War. Together with Hakim Adi and other colleagues, she co-founded the Black and Asian Studies Association in 1991, its radical objectives rooted in the need to encourage research into neglected areas of British history and campaigns for better educational experiences for young Black pupils in the UK.

Sherwood was senior research fellow with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies from 1991 to 2023, and her dedication to history was recognised with an honorary doctorate from the University of Chichester in 2022. Her contribution is profound, and greatly expands our understanding of the key roles played by African-descended communities in Britain and beyond.

Juanita Cox, Black British history community engagement fellow at the Institute of Historical Research

PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS

EXPERT-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TOURS FOR SMALL GROUPS

EXPLORING CRETE

CRUISING TO EPHESUS

EXPLORING THE PELOPONNESE

CRUISING DALMATIA
FROM DUBROVNIK TO SPLIT

A GASTRONOMIC GULET CRUISE
IN TURKEY

CRUISING THE CYCLADES

CRUISING THE COAST OF
MONTENEGRO

A GASTRONOMIC TOUR
OF SICILY

WALKING AND CRUISING
THE LYCIAN SHORE

Visit: petersommer.com **Email: info@petersommer.com** **Call: 01600 888 220**

7 TIMES
UK TOUR OPERATOR
OF THE YEAR

AITO GOLD AWARD 2015 · AITO SILVER AWARD 2016 · AITO GOLD AWARD 2017 · AITO SILVER AWARD 2023 · AITO GOLD AWARD 2022 · AITO SILVER AWARD 2019 · AITO SILVER AWARD 2018 · TOUR OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

AITO 5100 The Specialist Travel Association

ABTA ABTA No.Y6151

MICHAEL WOOD ON…

EPIC MEDIEVAL CHINESE VOYAGES

FRAN MONKS

"Why Elon Musk should take a lesson from Confucius"

WATCHING THE NEWS ON ELON MUSK'S SPACEX project to make humanity a "multi-planetary species" beginning with a colony on Mars, I found myself reflecting on an earlier moment in history. Between 1405 and 1433, the Chinese sent seven great missions to south-east Asia and across the Indian Ocean, visiting the Persian Gulf, India and east Africa. The first fleet alone comprised many dozens of ships and more than 27,000 men.

Admiral Zheng He's fleets included the biggest wooden vessels yet built, dwarfing the tiny ships that later carried Columbus and Magellan. Modern theories that such Ming 'treasure ships' could have exceeded 400 feet (122 metres) in length, however, are now rejected by experts; the size of wooden ships was always limited by the length of trees available for the keel.

For sailing in heavy seas, a single, strongly protected, scarf-jointed keel is the most that shipwrights judge acceptable for safety. According to today's traditional shipbuilders in Fujian, this would allow a boat in Chinese junk style to be at most 200–240 feet (61–73 metres) long. These vessels were highly seaworthy: between 1846 and 1848, a traditional Chinese junk, the *Keying*, sailed to the US and Britain, where it was visited by Queen Victoria.

Why Emperor Yongle commanded this enormous expenditure of resources is still the subject of much controversy. Today in China, these journeys are characterised as peaceable missions to display the flag, encourage trade and wield Chinese soft power. But the idea that Zheng He's expeditions were done for no real political, economic or practical gain seems, on the face of it, unlikely.

These routes had long been travelled by Arab navigators, and the Chinese had first visited east Africa as early as the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907). In some places, such as the Strait of Malacca, there was a deliberate effort to develop commercial entrepots. For example, Palembang, in south Sumatra, became an important Chinese trading post and a base for journeys into the Indian Ocean. Zheng He's voyages, then, were to advertise Chinese power, exact tribute, open up new trade routes and, in particular, to get the states of south-east Asia to acknowledge the power and majesty of the Ming.

When they had to, they engaged in warfare, destroying pirate fleets near Palembang and intervening in civil wars to establish friendly regimes in Sumatra and what's now Sri Lanka. So though they were not trying to colonise or conquer, their goal was to establish a network of control between China and the Indian Ocean over peoples who, in Zheng He's words, "resisted the transforming influence of Chinese culture". To create trading relations mutually beneficial to China and its various tributary states and kingdoms, "the sea routes were cleaned up and made peaceful so the natives were able to pursue their vocations in peace".

At that moment, with its technological lead over Europe, China seemed poised to dominate much of the world. In 1433, however, the voyages were abruptly stopped and the fleets broken up. In a memorable advert for the aerospace company Lockheed in the 1980s, that decision was compared to giving up the moon programme after Apollo 8. Though the greatest scientific inventors of the pre-modern world, the Chinese were dismissed as lacking the desire to push the bounds of knowledge.

But that is to misunderstand the concerns of traditional Chinese civilisation. There were two key reasons for stopping the voyages. First was the enormous expense, including inevitable losses at sea. But there was something else. The ruling Confucian ethic was the cultivation of the Middle Kingdom, not the conquest or domination of other peoples. As Matteo Ricci – a Jesuit in the Ming court – observed, it was the Europeans, not the Chinese, who were "consumed with the idea of supreme domination… always covetous of what others enjoy".

So when I hear the SpaceX plans, I think of Zheng He. Curiosity and scientific interest no doubt will drive human beings to the uninhabitable wastes of Mars, if only to harvest its rare earth metals. But beyond? Is Musk right to think that humanity can become a multi-world species? The facts, as I understand them, are completely against it. The distances are too vast for humanity to travel to other habitable systems, even if they exist. Our fate is on our planet – and here our efforts should be redoubled in this time of crisis. Confucius, I'm sure, would agree.

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His books include *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the long-standing but now dwindling Jewish community of Kochi

"Some say that the first Jews sailed to India on King Solomon's ships"

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine and won Gold in the New Podcast category at the 2024 British Podcast Awards

IN THE WARM WINTER SUN OF MATTANCHERRY, a district of Kochi in Kerala, I wandered the labyrinthine streets of Jew Town. The main thoroughfare, Synagogue Lane, is lined with shops sporting names such as Shalom, some displaying the Star of David in their windows, and selling Kashmiri shawls, spices and handicrafts. This is the historical heart of India's Jewish community – though today there are hardly any Jews living here.

Kochi (formerly Cochin) has a centuries-long Jewish presence. The date of the earliest arrivals is debated; some say that the first Jews sailed to south India on the ships of King Solomon some 30 centuries ago. Certainly, references to Jewish traders in India have been found in documents dating back to the eighth and ninth centuries AD, kept in a synagogue *genizah* (storage area) in Cairo.

A number of Jews settled in the ancient trading port of Kodungallur (formerly Cranganore) and, from the 14th century, dispersed; many moved to Kochi, around 20 miles to the south. Over the following centuries, European Jews, known in the local Malayalam language as *Paredesi* (literally, 'foreigners'), began to arrive in India. Many of them were refugees fleeing the Iberian peninsula during the Spanish Inquisition and following the expulsion of Jews in 1492. Over later centuries, more Jews came from western Europe, as well as from north Africa and the Middle East. At its height, Kochi's Jewish community numbered around 2,000 members. In the 19th century, though, some began leaving to pursue opportunities in Bombay (now Mumbai), and Calcutta (now Kolkata), and then, from 1948, to live permanently in the newly created state of Israel.

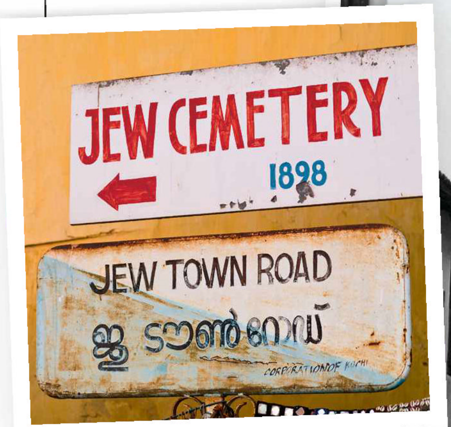
The Paradesi Synagogue, built in 1568 by Sephardic Jews, still stands next to Mattancherry Palace. As you enter the courtyard today, you can see that it shares a wall with a Hindu temple. The synagogue remains open for visitors and for worship, and is cared for by the local Indian community. The small but colourful interior features hand-painted 18th-century Chinese floor tiles and grand Belgian chandeliers. It also preserves engraved copper plates from the Hindu ruler of Kodungallur, given to a Jewish leader in around AD 1000.

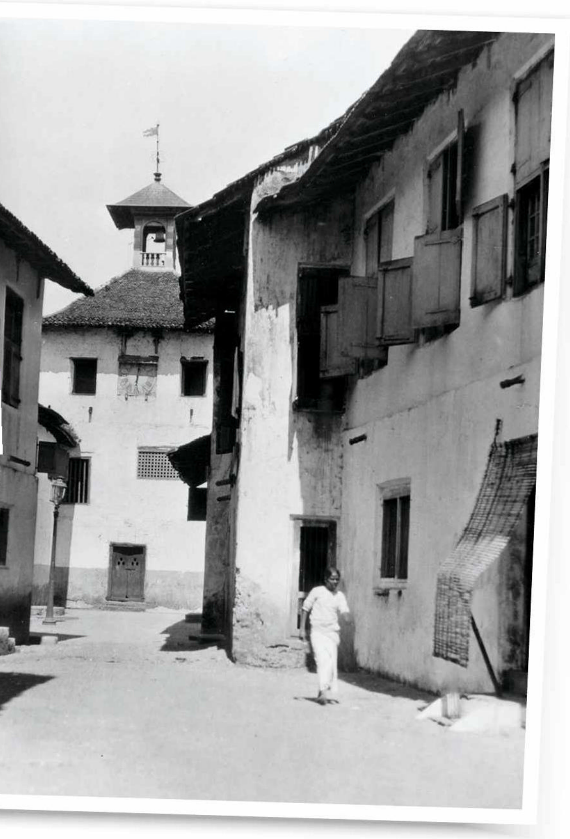
The last major celebration held here was in 2018, when the synagogue marked its 450th anniversary. Some 150 émigré members of the Paradesi Jewish community arrived from their homes across the world to mark the occasion. Generations of family members who had only heard stories of the synagogue came to visit, and to walk the same streets that their ancestors had strolled decades and centuries earlier.

The oldest member of India's Paradesi Jewish community, Sarah Cohen, died a year later, a few days short of her 97th birthday. Her embroidery shop still stands in Mattancherry, and still bears her name. It's now looked after by Thaha Ibrahim, a Muslim who had known Sarah and her husband for decades. He looked after her in her old age, and was treated by the couple as their son. He carries on her legacy today in the same place she lived, making embroidery following her patterns.

The Paradesi Synagogue is the only one out of eight in Kerala that is regularly active. I was told that the current rabbi is from overseas, and that the congregation for the Friday night service is typically made up of émigré Jewish visitors.

A portion of the Torah scrolls is read every Shabbat and during religious holidays, retrieved from the silver cases in which the synagogue's texts are kept. These cases are topped with gold crowns, some of which were gifts from local maharajas. Though Kochi's long-standing Jewish community has largely gone, their memories and ancient traditions are kept alive still.





ABOVE: Signs indicate the long-time presence of Jews in Kochi, Kerala

RIGHT: A c1950s photo of the old Jewish quarter of Cochin (now Kochi) featuring one of several synagogues that once flourished in the city

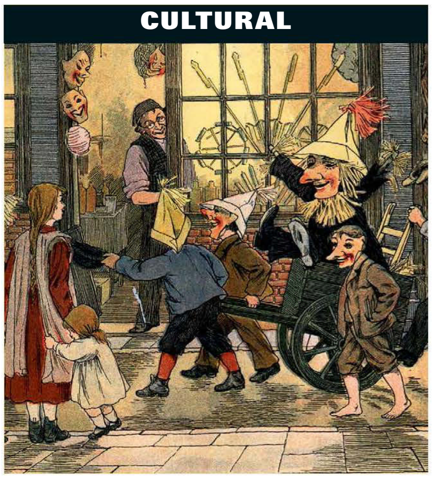
GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

PODCAST

THIS MONTH'S TOP PODCAST PICKS

Listen ad-free at **historyextra.com/podcast**
or with ads wherever you get your podcasts

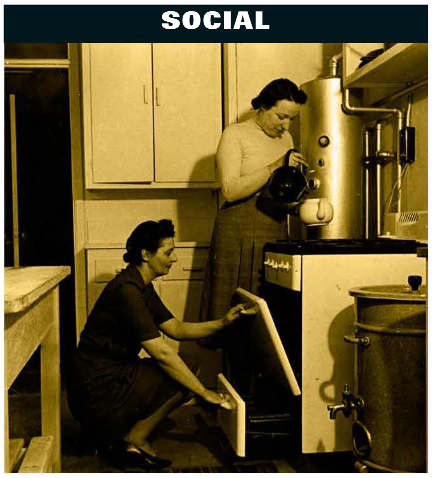
CULTURAL



Silliness and shame

From parading with horse skulls to chasing cheese down hills, Britain has a varied menu of folk customs – some rather strange. But, as **Liz Williams** explains, many also feature darker undercurrents of shame, judgment and social conformity.

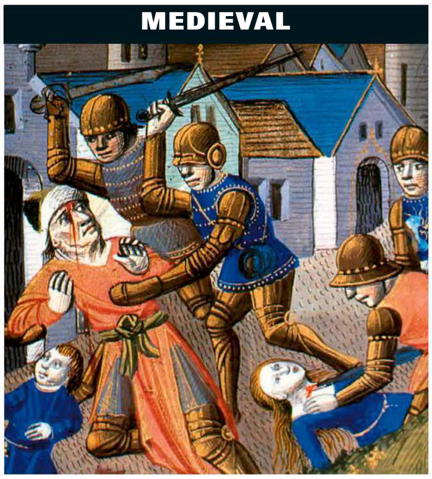
SOCIAL



Ideal homes

The carpeted bathroom was history's worst home-furnishing trend, according to **Deborah Sugg Ryan**, a design historian who answers listener questions on topics ranging from the interwar housing boom to the deathtrap that was the gas iron.

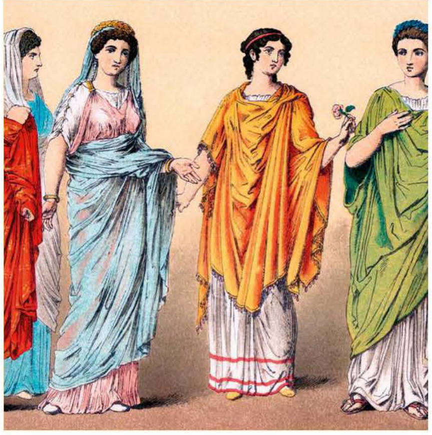
MEDIEVAL



Historical homicide

How violent were medieval cities? To find out, criminologist **Manuel Eisner** has mapped out the murders perpetrated in medieval London, York and Oxford. He joined us to discuss the project and to revisit some of the most notable killings.

ROMAN



Toga party

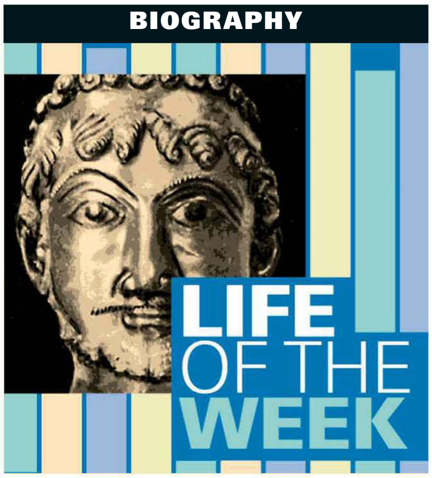
A good toga was the Roman equivalent of a posh suit – saved for best, and worn by elites. That's one of the insights into Roman clothing offered by **Ursula Rothe**. She explains how garments ranging from tunics to sandals could indicate social status in the ancient empire.

ANCIENT

Final frontiers

How did the Greeks and Romans see their neighbours? According to **Owen Rees**, the ancient superpowers imagined that those beyond their borders were savage barbarians or grotesque wolfmen. He also explores what we can learn about these empires from life on their distant frontiers.

BIOGRAPHY



Red-bearded ruler

Frederick Barbarossa is remembered as one of medieval Europe's most formidable rulers. He waged ruthless wars in Italy, clashed with the papacy – and came to an ignominious end. **Graham Loud** explores his rule and how he has been weaponised as a patriotic symbol in later centuries.

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Evacuee memories

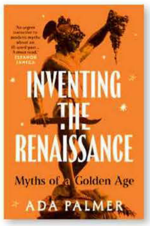
Dan Todman's feature on Second World War evacuations (February) reminded me of those times. As a 91-year-old, I well remember my evacuation from Plymouth in April 1940. Plymouth had been late in evacuating youngsters, so many of us experienced six months of the Blitz. However, my mother was pregnant, so it was decided that we would self-evacuate to the Welsh border town of Middletown, where my mother had a friend she had worked with in her early 20s.

As an eight-year-old, I was sent to the local school, which consisted of mostly farmers' children. After being asked by the teachers to relate my experiences, I was considered posh – and then immediately liked by the girls but hated by the boys, who chose to beat me up going to and from school.

This continued even at playtime, so much so that I was put in the girls' playground. Eventually, in mid-June, I was rescued by my uncle coming to take me to his home in Dudley, where I spent the summer. During this time, my father had found a cottage in the Dartmoor village of Mary Tavy, and after my sister was born at Welshpool, we returned to live on the Moors for two years. One can say that it was a very vivid memory!

Peter Lamb, Bristol

Children being evacuated to Wales during the Second World War. Our feature on these events inspired Peter Lamb to share his experiences



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Inventing the Renaissance: Myths of a Golden Age** by Ada Palmer. Read our review on page 74

Beyond the blockbusters

While I enjoyed the feature *What Is the Greatest Historical Film?* (February), I couldn't help notice that the vast majority of the films listed were in the English language. Limiting the choice to Hollywood blockbusters and English costume dramas seems a bit too Anglocentric – and perhaps even runs the risk of accusations of dumbing down.

I'd like to suggest three foreign language films that in my opinion deserve to be on the list. Eisenstein's epic 1925 *Battleship Potemkin* is a classic piece of Soviet propaganda, and the legendary Odessa Steps sequence alone is enough to put it on any shortlist of great historic films. *La Grande Illusion* (1937) raises issues of class and nationalism in its story of First World War French PoWs, and is surely the most powerful of anti-war films. Finally, 2004's *Downfall* depicts in gory detail the final, desperate days of Nazi Germany.

It seems a pity to exclude films just because the dialogue isn't in English.

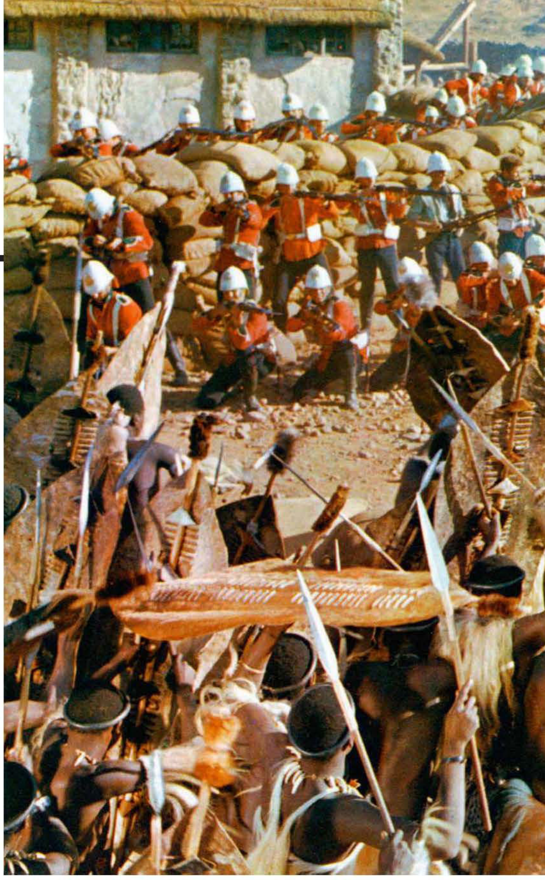
David Petrie, Glasgow

And the award goes to…

I loved your historical films article and was pleased that my favourite, *Zulu*, came fourth. Being born and growing up in South Wales with a father passionate about military history, visits to Brecon Cathedral and the Royal Welsh Regimental Museum to view the exhibits of the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift were regular occurrences.

The film may not be 100 per cent accurate, and from some points of view glorifies colonialism, but that doesn't take away the fact that the soldiers were just doing as they were told and fought bravely. It's an inspiring film, and despite having seen it several times, I still watch whenever it's broadcast.

Julia Charles, Cardiff



Accuracy matters

I think [1971's] *Fiddler on the Roof* deserves a nomination for greatest film. It's important because of its depiction of a small Jewish community as its citizens become part of the larger Jewish diaspora of the 20th century. Although the protagonist is a man, the film depicts the role of both men and women in one tiny village – which, in turn, represents the many tiny Jewish villages and communities that ceased to exist during this period.

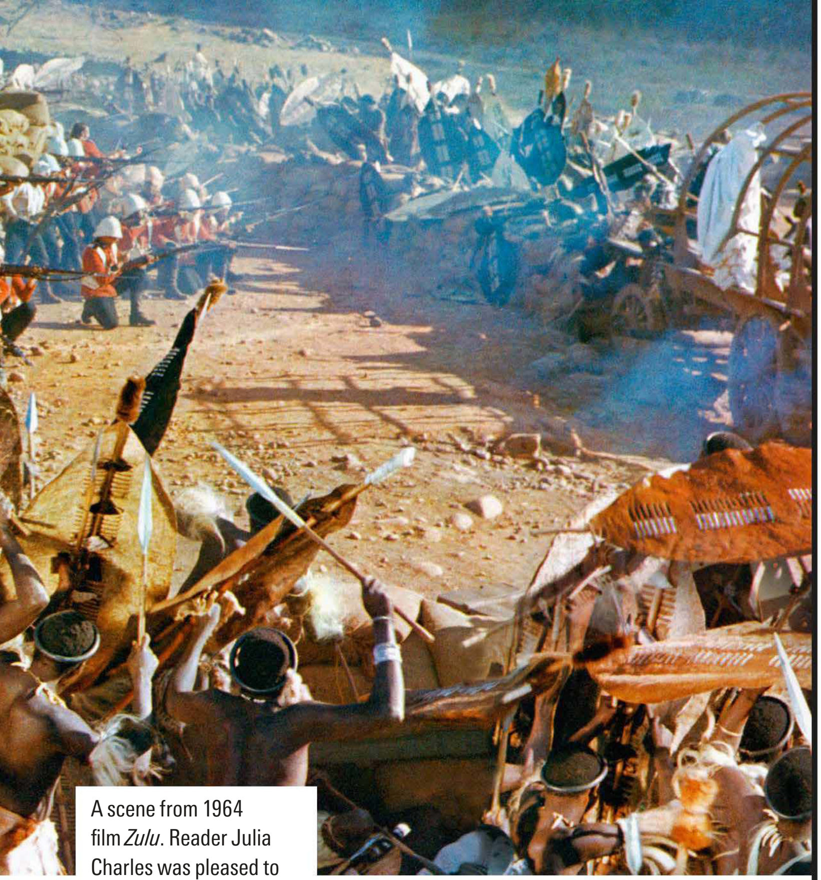
The wide audience appeal is an important part of why it should be considered a great historical film: it may be the only time that most audience members learn about pre-revolution Russia. In these instances, where the story and setting appear to be very accurate, I think it's important that they actually be accurate. A danger of historical films is that they can leave fans with a woefully inadequate knowledge of the underlying events – a knowledge they may later enthusiastically argue is 100 per cent valid.

I am reminded of a college professor who asked his students what they already knew about Pearl Harbor. After the fifth or sixth response, he said: "Let me rephrase: what do you already know about Pearl Harbor that you didn't learn from [epic 1970 drama] *Tora! Tora! Tora!*?"

Beverly Timm, Charlotte, North Carolina

SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY
▸ Page 44

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



A scene from 1964 film *Zulu*. Reader Julia Charles was pleased to see it chart highly in our list of the best historical films, chosen by experts and voted for by visitors to our website

Always read the label

In her *Q&A* piece on the world's first museum (February), Dr Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth refers to museum labels as "those bits of text that you rarely read in as much detail as you should". I'm sure I'm not the only person who drives his family to distraction by reading them in far *more* detail than I should – meaning that the shop and/or cafe is closed by the time we finish.

Paul Lakin, Cambridge

Frontier games

As I was finishing my leisurely reading of the February issue, I came upon the *Q&A* piece on the United States' War Plan Red [which, in 1930, charted a hypothetical conflict with Britain, and included the invasion of Canada, then still part of the British empire]. A shiver truly went up my spine.

As a Canadian, I'm well aware that, despite the apparent harmony along 'the world's longest undefended border', our relationship with our US neighbours is complicated. They attempted invasion in 1775, which was unsuccessful, and 1812–14, which was repulsed repeatedly, with border skirmishes also breaking out in the 1860s.

Before reading the article, I had no idea that, as recently as the 1930s, our sovereignty was at risk. With political uncertainty once again making us feel under siege from the south, history is reminding us that such threats never truly cease.

Simon J Lucy, Winnipeg

An Ottawa monument to the people who defended Canada against the US in 1812. Reader Simon J Lucy was struck by parallels between that conflict and recent political uncertainty

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL
Editor Rob Attar *robertattar@historyextra.com*
Deputy editor Matt Elton *mattelton@historyextra.com*
Senior production editor Spencer Mizen
Production editor Jon Bauckham
Content producer Danny Bird
Junior content producer Isabel King
Picture editor Samantha Nott *samnott@historyextra.com*
Art director Susanne Frank
Art editor Sheu Ho
Senior deputy art editor Rachel Dickens
Podcast editor Ellie Cawthorne
Podcast content producer Emily Briffett
Content director Dr David Musgrove
Strategic projects editor Charlotte Hodgman
Digital editor Elinor Evans
Deputy digital editor Kev Lochun
Premium content editor Rachel Dinning
Digital content producers Lauren Good, James Osborne

Fact-checkers: Dr Robert Blackmore, John Evans, Amy Louise Smith, Felicity Day, Gordon O'Sullivan, Daniel Watkins
Picture consultant: Everett Sharp
Thanks to Paul Bloomfield, Rebecca Franks, Jonathan Wright, Sarah Lambert, Lisa Moses

ADVERTISING & MARKETING
Senior brand sales executive
Sarah Luscombe 0117 300 8530
Brand sales executive
Victoria Allan 0117 300 8212
Victoria.Allan@immediate.co.uk
Group direct marketing manager
Laurence Robertson 00353 5787 57444
Direct marketing executive Aisha Babb
US representative Kate Buckley
buckley@buckleypell.com

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
PR manager Natasha Lee
Natasha.Lee@immediate.co.uk

LICENSING & SYNDICATION
Director of International, Licensing & Top Gear Magazine, UK Tim Hudson
Head of Partners, Brand Management & Ethical Compliance Molly Hope-Seton
Head of Licensing Tom Shaw
Head of Syndication Richard Bentley

HISTORYEXTRA PODCAST
Head of podcasts Ben Youatt
Podcast producer Jack Bateman
Podcast deputy Brittany Collie
Podcast coordinator Emily Thorne
Podcast assistants Daniel Kramer-Arden, Samuel Leale-Green and Lewis Dobbs

PRODUCTION
Production director Koli Pickersgill
Production manager Lee Spencer
Senior repro technician Darren McCubbin
Senior ad services co-ordinator Cherine Robins

IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY
Commercial director Jemima Dixon
Group managing director Alex White
CEO Sean Cornwell
CFO & COO Dan Constanda
Chairman Tom Bureau

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE
Founding editor Greg Neale

BBC STUDIOS, UK PUBLISHING
SVP Global Licensing Stephen Davies
Global Director, Magazines Mandy Thwaites
Compliance manager Cameron McEwan
(uk.publishing@bbc.com)

IMMEDIATE
a Burda company

Vol 26 No 4 – April 2025
BBC History Magazine is published by Immediate Media Company London Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes.

BBC History Magazine was established to publish authoritative history, written by leading experts, in an accessible and attractive format. We seek to maintain the high journalistic standards traditionally associated with the BBC.

© Immediate Media Company London Limited, 2025 – ISSN: 1469 8552
Not for resale. All rights reserved. Unauthorised reproduction in whole or part is prohibited without written permission. Every effort has been made to secure permission for copyright material. In the event of any material being used inadvertently, or where it proved impossible to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue. MSS, photographs and artwork are accepted on the basis that *BBC History Magazine* and its agents do not accept liability for loss or damage to same. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

We abide by IPSO's rules and regulations. To give feedback about our magazines, please visit immediate.co.uk, email *editorialcomplaints@immediate.co.uk* or write to Katherine Conlon, Immediate Media Co., Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT.

Immediate Media Company is working to ensure that all of its paper is sourced from well-managed forests. This magazine can be recycled, for use in newspapers and packaging. Please remove any gifts, samples or wrapping and dispose of it at your local collection point.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

FSC MIX Supporting responsible forestry FSC® C015155 www.fsc.org

ipso. Regulated

abc Jan–Dec 2024 114,967

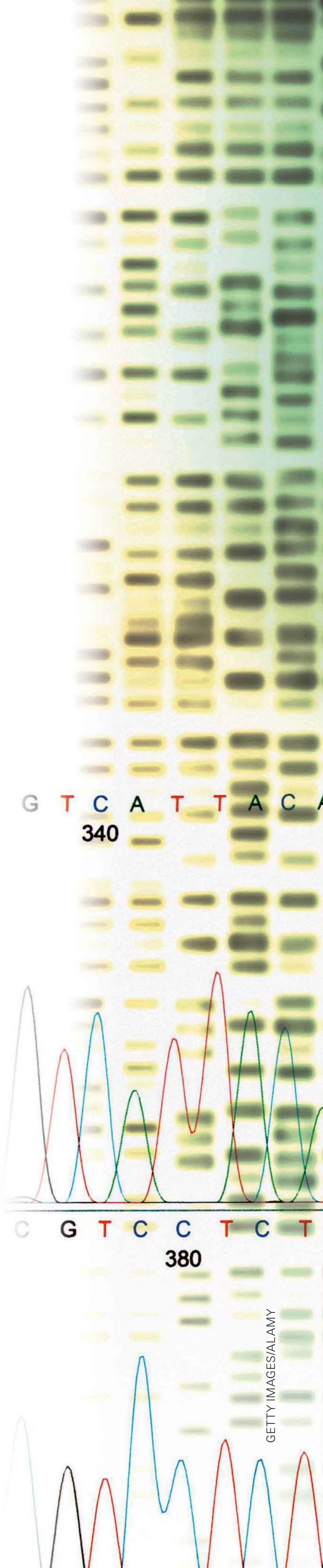
WRITE TO US

We welcome your letters, while reserving the right to edit them. We may publish your letters on our website. Please include a daytime phone number and, if emailing, a postal address (not for publication). Letters should be no longer than 250 words. **Email:** *letters@historyextra.com* **Post:** BBC History Magazine, Immediate Media, Eagle House, Bristol, BS1 4ST

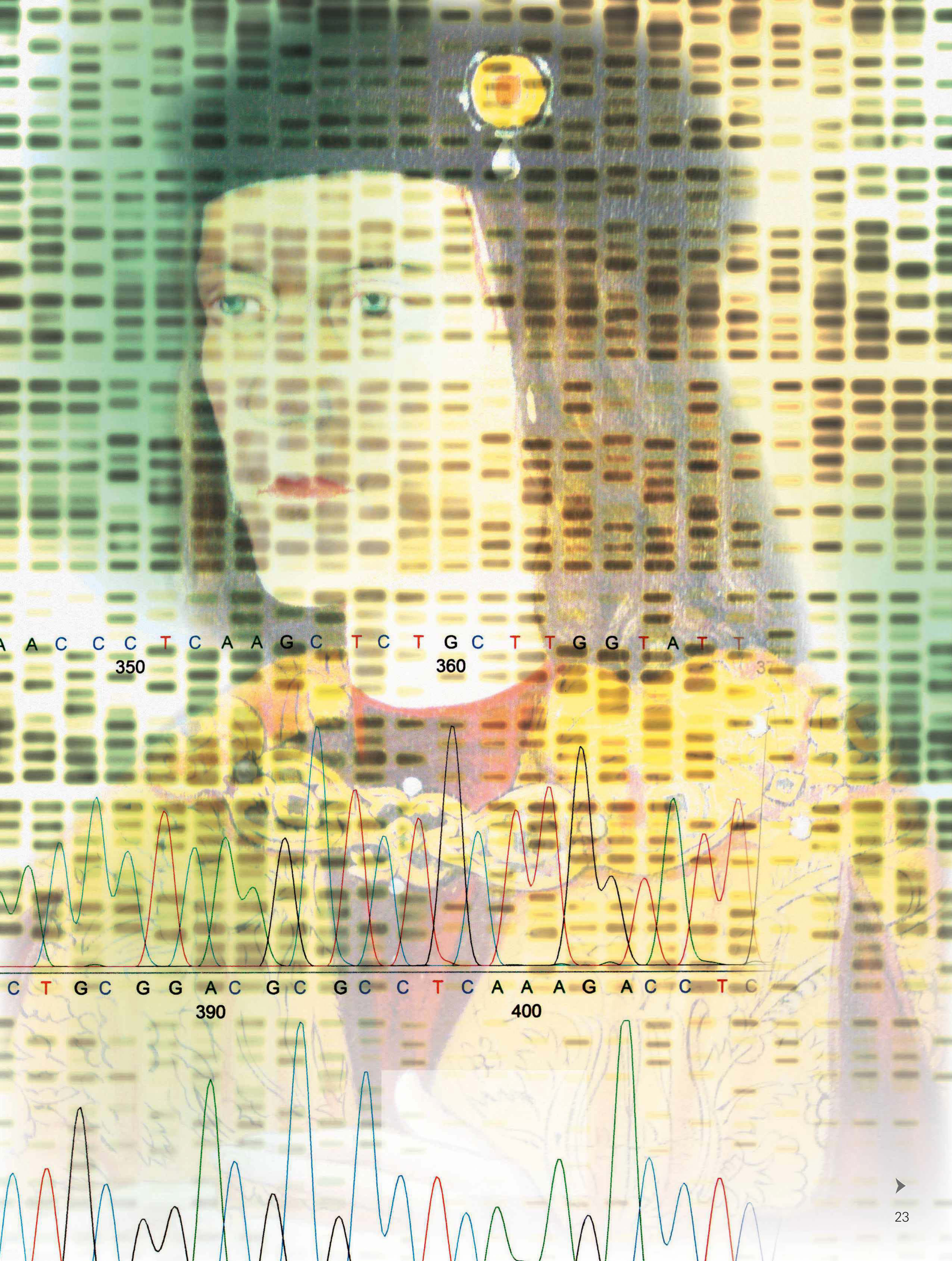
The opinions expressed by our commentators are their own and may not represent the views of *BBC History Magazine* or Immediate Media Company

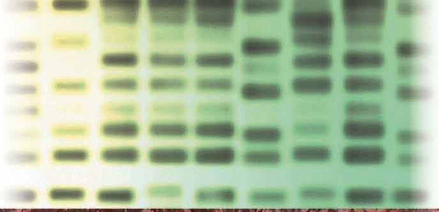
WE PROVED, WITH 99.999% CERTAINTY, THAT THE SKELETON IN THE CAR PARK WAS RICHARD III. HERE'S HOW

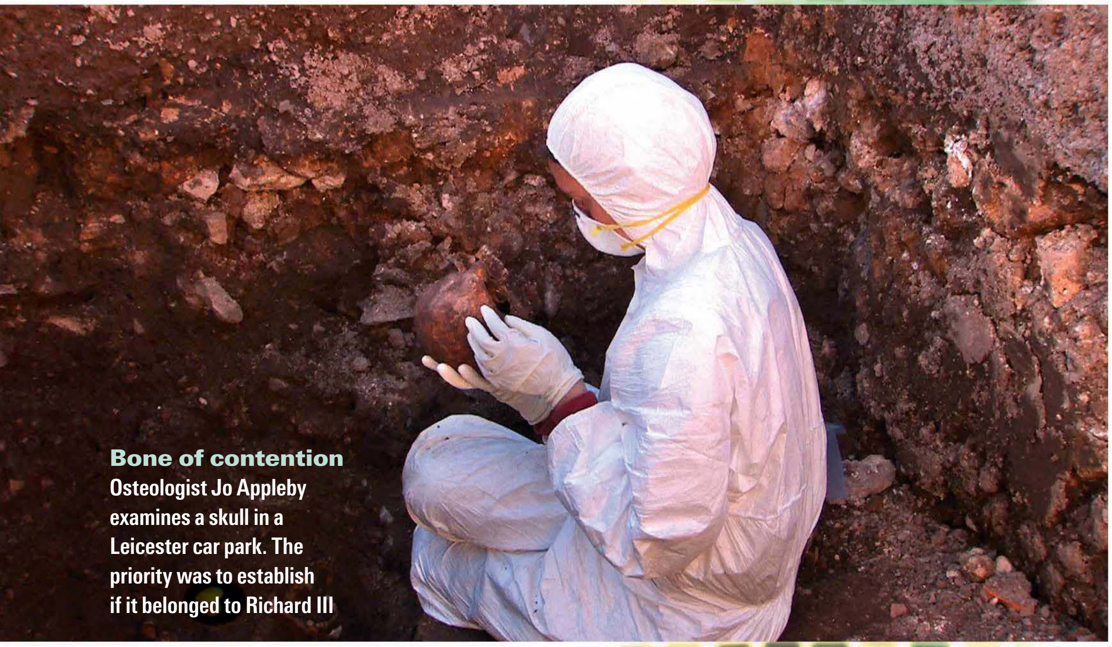
Turi King led the verification team that worked on Richard III's rediscovered remains. Here, on the 10th anniversary of the king's reburial service, she reveals how science finally solved a 500-year-old cold case



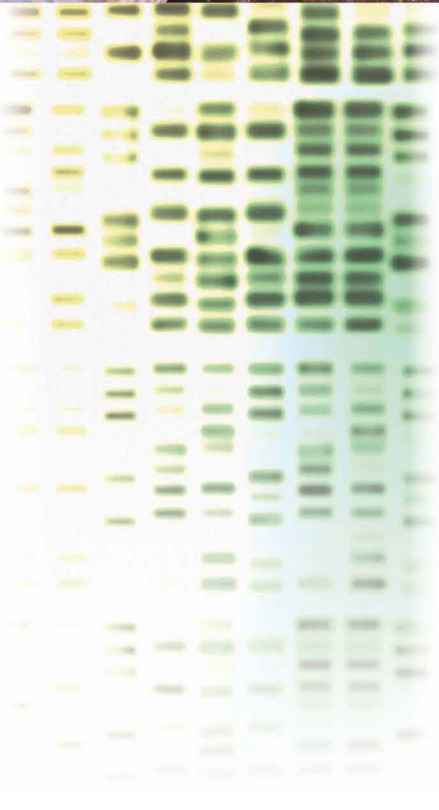
GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY


A A C C C T C A A G C T C T G C T T G G T A T T
350
360
C T G C G G A C G C G C C T C A A A G A C C T C
390
400





Bone of contention
Osteologist Jo Appleby examines a skull in a Leicester car park. The priority was to establish if it belonged to Richard III



History isn't often made in car parks. Yet in the early autumn of 2012, something remarkable was in the air – or, should I say, under the ground. On Wednesday 5 September, 13 years ago, an archaeologist and osteologist called Jo Appleby could be found crouching over a skeleton in what had once been the medieval church of the Greyfriars in Leicester – now an unremarkable car park. Jo was clad head-to-toe in white overalls, wearing a face mask, and giving the human remains below her every last drop of her attention. The reasons for Jo's great care would soon become all-too evident. The skeleton over which she crouched had lain under the soil for more than 500 years – and it would yield one of the most remarkable historical discoveries of the 21st century.

Jo could tell a few things about the skeleton as she, bone by bone, brought it into the light. This appeared to be a male, with injuries incurred at or around the time of death – injuries that could have been sustained in battle. He was aged in his twenties or thirties. Yet it was when Jo uncovered the spine – and noticed that it was curved – that, as she later told me, the hairs on the back of her neck began to stand on end. Could this skeleton be the remains of Richard III, the monarch so famously described by Shakespeare as a "bunch-back'd toad"? It looked promising. But we had to prove it.

Our first priority was to lift the skeleton and bring it back to the University of Leicester for more extensive analysis. All the while, the media interest in the project to find Richard III was picking up pace – the press and public were captivated by the possibility of medieval England's most controversial king residing in a car park. What we were about to announce at a joint press conference by the University of Leicester and the Richard III Society would send this fascination into overdrive.

Yet we couldn't let the media feeding frenzy distract us. While newspapers waxed lyrical about the sensational discovery of the 'king in the car park', we knew we just had to get our heads down and quietly and calmly get on with a rigorous investigation.

> **It was when Jo noticed that the spine was curved that the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end**

Missing for centuries

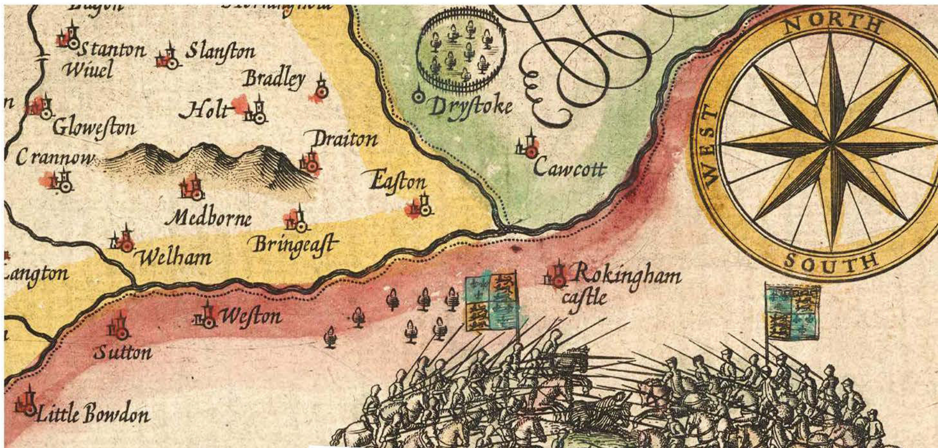
So how did we go about identifying these remains as Richard III? Well, let's back up a bit. If you were to go missing, how would your family and friends describe you to a search team? Your loved ones would probably provide them with information such as your last known location, what you were wearing when you left home in the morning, your age, and your hair colour. The Richard III project was essentially doing the same thing – only it was attempting to solve one of history's most famous missing person cases, and that person had been dead for more than five centuries.

As in a modern case, we had a list of what was known about Richard that would help us identify him. The king's last known location, as evidenced by historical documents, was in the church of the Greyfriars friary in Leicester, where he was buried after his death in 1485, having been defeated by Henry Tudor at the battle of Bosworth. More specifically, Richard was known to be buried in the choir, a high-status part of the church. However,

CARL VIVIAN, UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER/GETTY IMAGES

Rediscovering Richard III
Mike Pitts tells the remarkable story of the discovery of the medieval king's remains at *historyextra.com/rediscovering-richard*

King's head Appleby points out a detail on the skull during a February 2013 press conference. By then, media interest was reaching fever pitch



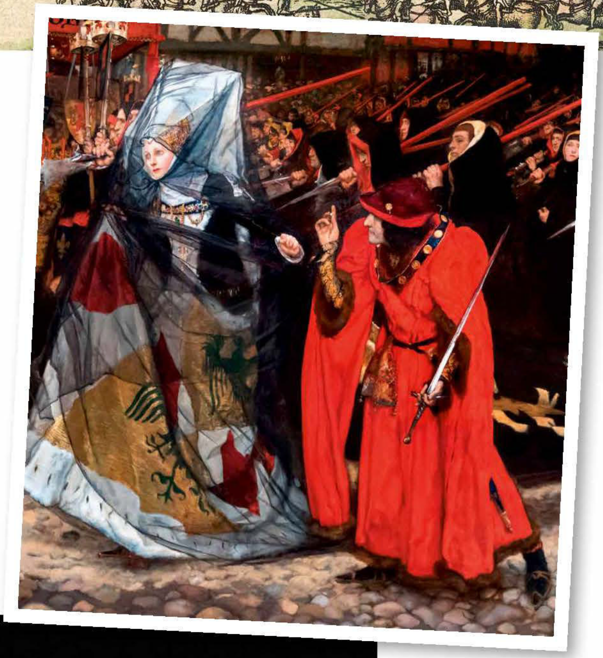
Killing field A 17th-century depiction of the battle of Bosworth. It was here that Richard III's turbulent two-year reign came to a bloody end

more than 50 years later, the friary had been torn down during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, and the land had been sold off more than once and built upon. We knew the location of the friary precinct, but the precise whereabouts of Richard's grave had been lost to history.

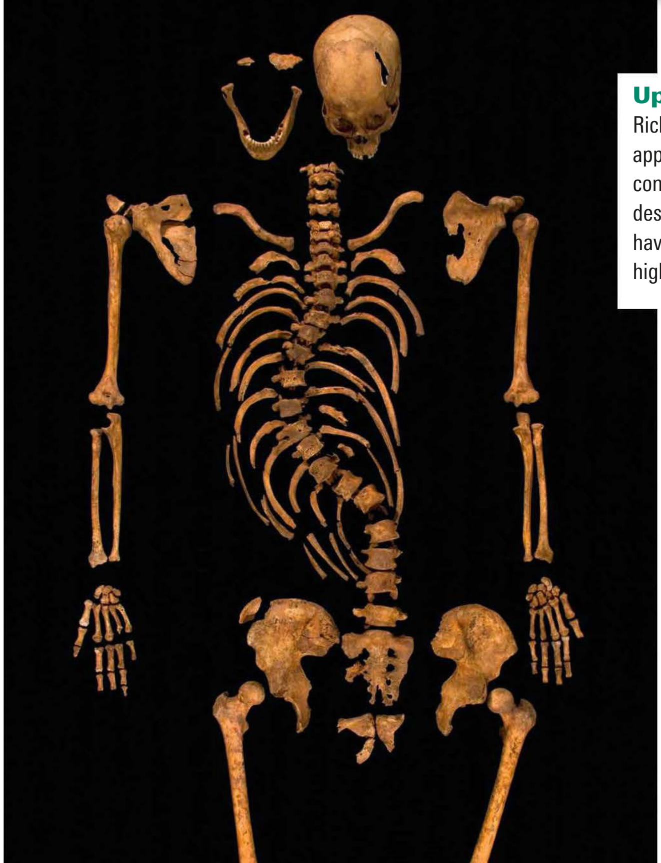
Being a king, Richard's birth and death dates were well known, so we knew he was 32 years old when he died. Shakespeare, in his plays, famously made him out to be a 'hunchback' with a limp and a withered arm. But Shakespeare wrote his play *Richard III* in the early 1590s, more than a hundred years after Richard's death, so can only have been drawing on previous accounts of the king's appearance, quite possibly tinged with Tudor propaganda. Only two of these accounts were from people who, it seems, had actually met Richard III: one of these, John Rous's renowned *Historia Regum Angliae*, described Richard as having one shoulder higher than the other. So Richard having a spinal abnormality *was* a possibility.

This gave us our list of characteristics to look for when identifying Richard. Crucially, we also had to put a number on how likely it was that the skeleton belonged to the king.

We started by sexing and ageing the skeleton. This can be achieved by examining the bones. For example, men's pelvises are shaped differently to women's. And while it's not possible to precisely determine age at death, an examination of the teeth, skull and ends of bones allows an age range to be specified. From this, Jo Appleby and the team determined that the skeleton belonged to a man, aged 30–34 years when he died. The fact that he was male was also supported by the



Smear tactics? An 1896 painting of Richard III with his wife, Anne Neville. Once Shakespeare had described Richard as a "bunch-back'd toad", the king's historical reputation was sealed



Up and down Richard III's skeleton appeared to support contemporary descriptions of him having one shoulder higher than the other

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/CARL VIVIAN, UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

BONE ANALYSIS

Painful end A model of the CT scanner used to take images of Richard III's remains. Scans of the skeleton discovered 11 injuries sustained at, or around, the time of death

Number crunching Turi King in the lab with a sample of the remains. The aim of the DNA testing was to provide a statistical likelihood for the skeleton belonging to Richard

presence of a Y chromosome, which is inherited down the male line.

By examining the bones by eye – as well as using computed tomography (CT) X-ray scanning technology – the team, including forensic engineer Sarah Hainsworth, was also able to detect and examine 11 perimortem injuries (those sustained at or around the time of death). All of these were consistent with being made by weapons from the medieval period. Scans and a reconstruction of the skeleton confirmed the curvature of the spine and suggested that the right shoulder would have been slightly higher than the left.

Something fishy

What we eat and drink affects the make-up of the chemical elements contained within our bones and teeth. The study of this chemical mix is known as stable isotope analysis, and in this case showed that the individual had a high-status diet that had a strong marine (fish) component to it. Meanwhile, radiocarbon dating delivered a 95.4 per cent probability that the subject died between 1456 and 1530, bracketing the date of Richard's death in 1485.

While Jo and the team studied the individual's bones, I carried out the genetic analysis of the remains. DNA testing has the potential to unlock the secrets of a skeleton, but there's absolutely no guarantees: DNA degrades following death, and what remains is often too fragmented and damaged to analyse. Fortunately, with our Greyfriars skeleton, this proved not to be the case.

> **The injuries on the skeleton were consistent with being made by weapons from the medieval period**

So how exactly did we use DNA to link this particular skeleton to Richard III? DNA testing for identification purposes in this sort of case involves analysing the DNA from the remains and comparing it with that of a known, usually close, relative. But there was a problem: we didn't have the remains of any of Richard's close relatives to hand. The solution was to test against *living* relatives of the medieval king.

Yet this approach threw up a further complication: Richard himself left no known living descendants. That meant that the DNA we needed would have to come from descendants of other members of his family. And, as mitochondrial DNA is found in the eggs that mothers generate to produce offspring, we required a relative whose relationship to Richard III was by an entirely female line.

Fortunately, we already knew of one such person. His name was Michael Ibsen, and he was descended from one of Richard III's sisters, Anne of York. Soon our researchers had traced another female-line descendant of Anne, a woman called Wendy Duldig, who also happened to be Michael's 14th cousin, twice removed. We had our mitochondrial DNA comparators at the ready.

Then came a breakthrough moment: those comparators showed a match with the Greyfriars skeleton.

Interestingly, analysis of the Y chromosome, which is passed down through the male line, didn't show a match to the living relatives we tested. However, I knew from my years of research in this field, that we might

ALAMY/CARL VIVIAN, UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

find what's known as a false paternity, where the biological father is not the recorded father somewhere on the family tree: the genealogy says one thing, but the DNA tells you something else has gone on!

Picking a winner

It was now time to put that all-important statistical number on the likelihood of the skeleton being Richard. And to do that we turned to a method that's widely deployed in forensic cases such as this: Bayesian statistics.

Bayesian statistics is a way of calculating the probability of something, and updating that probability by bringing in various sources of data or knowledge. An example that's often used is horse racing. Say you have two horses, A and B, racing one another. If you don't know anything about either horse, you might conclude that the chance of horse A winning is 50/50.

But what if we could add some more information here by counting how many times each horse has won when they'd been in a race against each other previously? What if you knew that, out of the 12 times these two horses have raced against one another before, horse A has won eight times (67 per cent of the time)? Well, knowing that, you'd say the probability of horse A winning is higher and the chance of horse B winning is only 33 per cent. Each new piece of information you add will change the likelihood of each horse being the winner.

The beauty of the Bayesian method is that it allows us to combine all the evidence together into one calculation to get a statistical number of the likelihood of the skeleton belonging to Richard III. In that, we have only two possibilities: hypothesis 1 is that this is Richard III; the second is that it's not Richard III. Remember we had our list of features to look for? Well each one gives us a new bit of evidence we can add to the mix and allows us to calculate what's known as a likelihood ratio for hypothesis 1 (it's Richard) versus hypothesis 2 (it's not Richard).

The first count was: how often do you find skeletons from individuals in high-status parts of churches who are male and aged between 26 and 35? It's about 18 per cent of the time, if you want to know. We did the same for each category. We looked at the counts of how often you find skeletons with scoliosis in the medieval period, how often you find skeletons with perimortem injuries in high-status parts of churches, and the likelihood of the radiocarbon date (given that we knew the friary was built in the 13th century and closed in 1538).

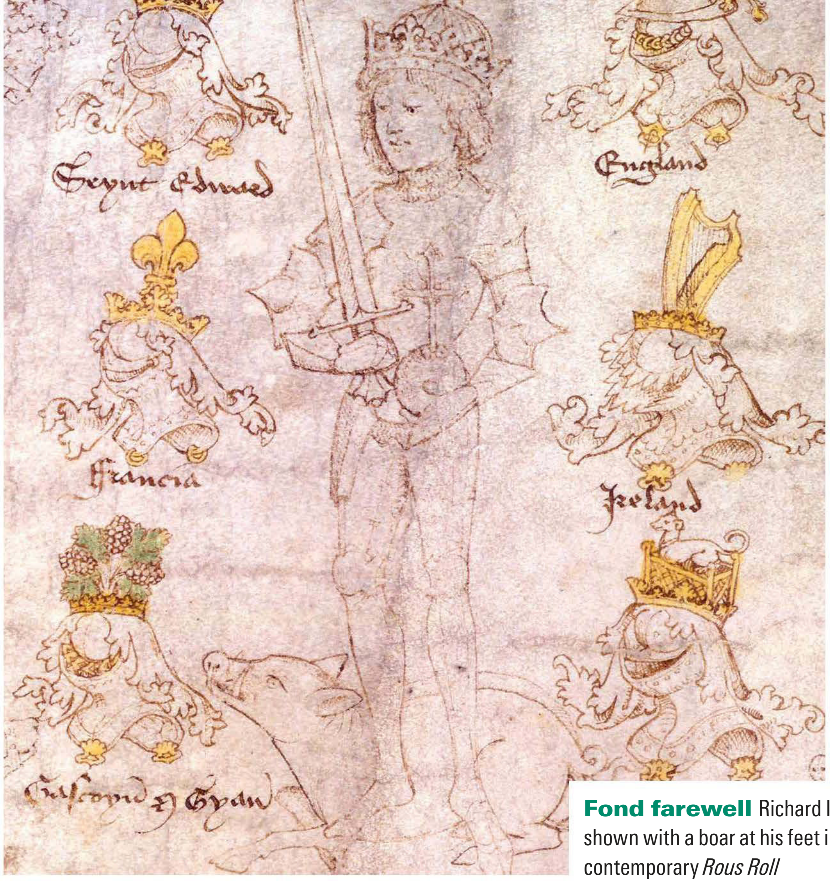
One piece of evidence that we didn't throw into the mix was the stable isotope data that showed that this was a person with a high-status diet. We would expect anyone buried in a high-status part of the church to eat better than the vast majority of the population, so adding this to our calculations would, we reasoned, have unduly biased the statistics towards the skeleton being Richard. We also included the fact that the Y chromosome didn't match.

So, what did it all show? We were lucky enough to have David Balding, a world-famous forensic statistician, on the team calculating the likelihood ratio for us. And the results David produced were, I think it's fair to say, pretty conclusive. Even with our conservative approach, the likelihood ratio was 6.7 million to 1 in favour of hypothesis 1. That translates to a probability of between 99.999 and 99.99999 per cent that these were indeed the remains of King Richard III. We were pretty excited with the results – and, I would argue, with good reason.

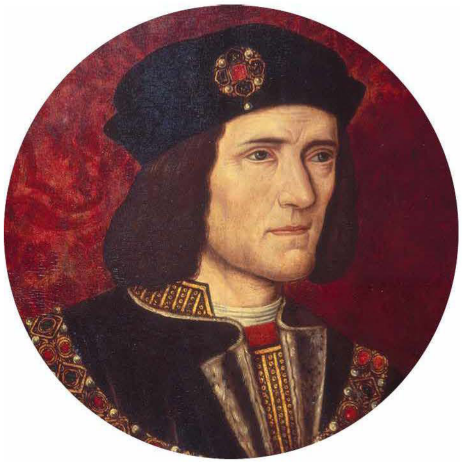
Talk of the nation

We all know what happened next. Media attention intensified further still. Richard III could soon be seen staring back at readers from the pages of some of our most successful tabloids. He was name-checked in Prime Ministers Questions. Rumour has it that he even became a popular topic of conversation in the nation's pubs! Then, on 26 March 2015, the medieval king was reinterred in Leicester Cathedral in an extraordinary ceremony that was televised around the world.

Yet not everyone was convinced. A handful of people (not one of them, it has to be said, a statistician or geneticist) still didn't believe we'd found him. Quite often they would pick one bit of evidence (often the



Fond farewell Richard III (above) shown with a boar at his feet in the contemporary *Rous Roll*
BELOW: Michael Ibsen (left), Wendy Duldig and Jeff Ibsen, all descendants of Richard's sister Anne, place roses on the king's coffin during his reburial service in 2015

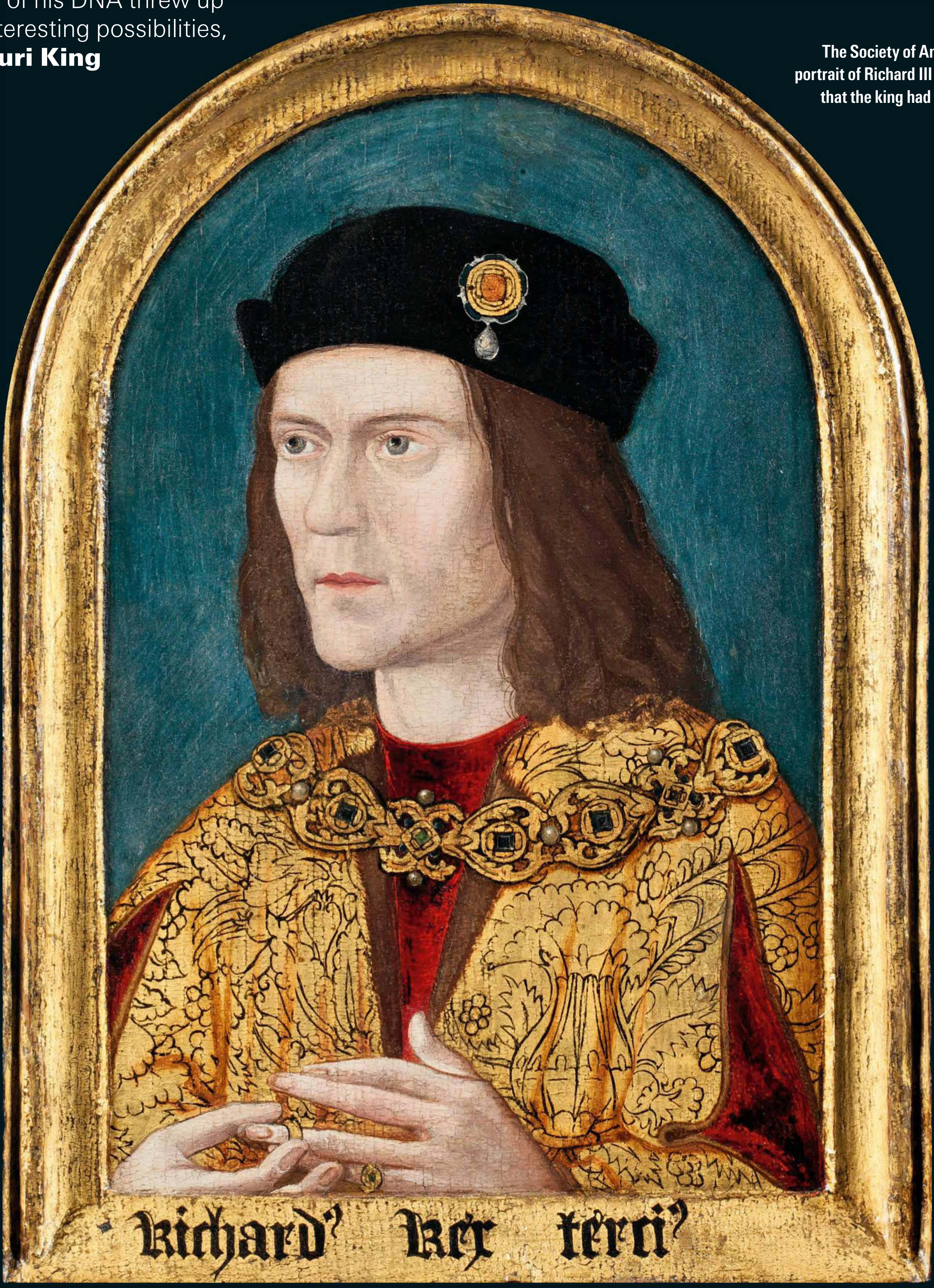


The Royal Collection portrait of Richard III, painted in the early 16th century

TOPFOTO/GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

A BLONDE BOMBSHELL?

What did Richard III *really* look like? Analysis of his DNA threw up some interesting possibilities, writes **Turi King**



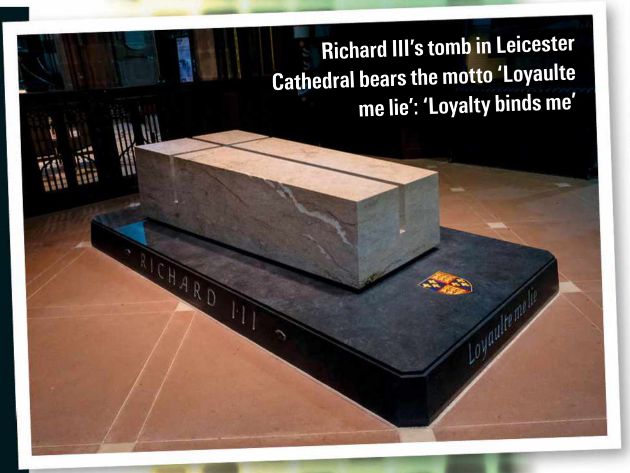
The Society of Antiquaries portrait of Richard III suggests that the king had blue eyes

As someone who studied art history at university, I've long been aware that none of the portraits of Richard III date from his lifetime. In fact, the two earliest portraits left to us today weren't produced until the early part of the 16th century, a generation after his death. One of these is now in the Royal Collection; the other, an arched-frame portrait, is in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

What's interesting is that, though they were produced at roughly the same time, the portraits differ from one another. The Royal Collection painting shows the king with dark-brown hair (it's thought that, at some point, the portrait was altered to change Richard's eye colour from brown to grey). The arched-frame portrait, on the other hand, shows Richard with lighter-brown hair and blue eyes.

I was intrigued to know whether science could help give us an indication of which of the two portraits most closely fit what the DNA could tell us. A former colleague of mine, Manfred Kayser, had developed forensic tests to predict someone's hair and eye colour based on known variants in genes associated with pigmentation. While not an exact science, and certainly not something that could be used as part of the identification, I was curious as to what genetic analysis of these variants in Richard III's DNA could tell us.

After carrying out the sequencing, we compared Richard's genetic makeup with a database that Manfred had compiled. This indicated a 96 per cent chance of Richard having blue eyes and a 77 per cent chance of him having blond hair. A word of caution: this would have been a childhood hair colour – and, as many people will have experienced themselves, hair can darken with age. However, our investigations do suggest that the arched-frame portrait in the Society of Antiquaries of London is likely to be the most faithful representation of the medieval king.



Richard III's tomb in Leicester Cathedral bears the motto 'Loyaulte me lie': 'Loyalty binds me'

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

DNA) and say it wasn't robust enough on its own. Or they would claim that the skeleton could have been one of Richard III's female-line relatives.

As part of our analysis, we constructed a family tree, tracing his female-line relatives going back several generations, out sideways and back down to Richard's generation. By comparing this with historical information, we were able to show that these known relatives were either female (and so could be ruled out), or either too young, too old or too dead to have fought at Bosworth. Or they were recorded as not being at the battle. So the only person on that tree who could have been at Bosworth was Richard himself.

Beyond this, given the rarity of the mitochondrial type, the chances of someone carrying it being alive around the right time, in the right age range, known to be killed in battle, have a spinal abnormality and be buried in the choir of Leicester's church of the Greyfriars were vanishingly small.

Our critics also seemingly didn't realise that the beauty – indeed the entire point – of Bayesian analysis is that it allows you to combine all the strands to come up with a likelihood. To put it another way, if you were to go missing, people would describe you by such factors as your age, your height, your build and what you were last wearing. The police wouldn't go on just one distinguishing characteristic, such as brown hair or blue eyes. Just as we did, they would identify you based on all the strands of evidence together. And the evidence was overwhelming that these were the remains of King Richard III.

Ten years on, I confess I still have to pinch myself that I was even involved in the project. I'm so proud of all that was achieved. The team that carried out the planning, the excavation and the enormous amount of post-excavation work comprised a huge number of academics and non-academics all bringing their own expertise to the table to make the project the tremendous success it was. No one person could have carried out the project on their own. The whole was greater than the sum of its parts as we came together to solve this 500-year-old cold case. **H**

Ten years on, I confess I still have to pinch myself that I was even involved in the project to find Richard III

Turi King is director of the Milner Centre for Evolution at the University of Bath. In 2012, she led the verification team during the exhumation and reburial of Richard III

In BBC Radio 4's **The Reunion: Finding Richard III,** Kirsty Wark interviewed some of the key figures in the search for the medieval king. Listen here: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000tvgf*

Robert Wedderburn
Firebrand abolitionist

While most British radicals fought for the rights of the exploited white working class, one man saw such rights as entwined with those of enslaved black workers. **RYAN HANLEY** tells the story of the ‘notorious firebrand’ who campaigned against slavery

One October evening in 1809, Robert Wedderburn was walking through London, one child asleep in his arms and his daughter beside him, when he saw a gang of about 20 drunks encircling a young man near his home on Peter Street, St Giles. Things were getting hairy; it was clear the man was in danger. Wedderburn tried to pull him away from the gang peacefully, but it was no good. If he wanted to help, he’d have to get his hands dirty.

He handed the sleeping child to his daughter, took off his coat and “said he would fight one or two of them at a time”. Alas, they all set upon him at once and beat him with thick walking sticks. He might have died then and there outside his house, in front of his children, if a soldier had not happened by. But that was Wedderburn: he never could walk away from a fight – all the more so when the odds were stacked against him.

When the gang members were rounded up and brought before the magistrates, Wedderburn was the chief witness for the prosecution. A journalist for *The Star*, hanging around the courts looking for a story, noted that “the witness having betrayed much violence of temper, during his cross-examination, was reprimanded by the court”. That, too, was typical of the man who became a leader in London’s working-class radical underworld.

> “Wedderburn gained his most important life lessons from the rebellious black women in his life”

It is easy to see why Wedderburn had a problem with authority. Born in Jamaica in the early 1760s, he gained his most important life lessons from the rebellious black women in his life, notably his mother, Rosanna, and grandmother, Amy. His mother had been a ladies’ maid until his father, the Scottish planter James Wedderburn, had purchased her, as Robert later put it, “for purposes of lust”. James abused his legal status as the ‘owner’ of this beautiful and accomplished woman to try to compel her into a consensual relationship. She did bear at least two of his children but loathed her captor, and was not shy about showing it. Rosanna made James’s life such a misery that he eventually sold her on; he also signed manumission papers granting freedom to their sons, Robert and James Jr.

That was lesson one: by being obstinate and difficult, and not shying away from confrontation, even apparently powerless people could negotiate a change in their circumstances and secure a better life for their children.

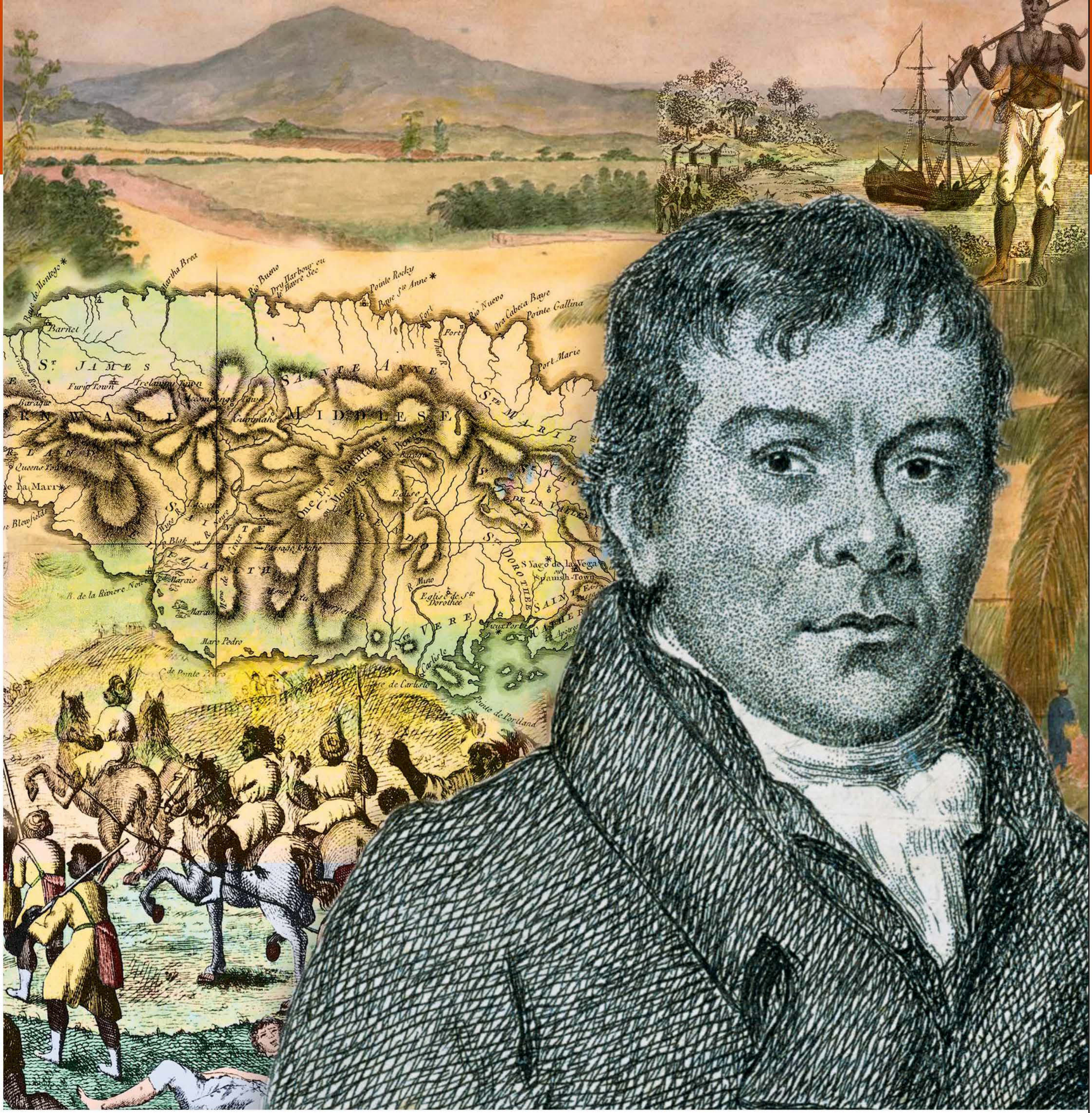
Robert was sent to Kingston to be raised by his maternal grandmother, Amy. She was reputed to be an Obeah woman – a healer and spiritual guide with the power to communicate with spirits, hence her nickname, ‘Talkee Amy’. Wedderburn himself had no time for mysticism, leaving superstition to “silly Europeans”. But he always remembered that Amy’s ‘owner’, a man she had cared for when he was a child, whipped her mercilessly under suspicion of bewitching his father’s smuggling ship and causing him to be captured by the Spanish. That scene – a young man brutally beating a defenceless old woman accused of witchcraft and facing no repercussions – was seared into the young Wedderburn’s memory.

Here was lesson two: he would never accede to the ‘legitimate authority’ of either religion or law – two means used by the powerful to justify trampling on the powerless.

Working-class insurrectionary

Wedderburn worked as a millwright, a sailor and a soldier before crossing the Atlantic and forging a career as a tailor in England. In 1813, he was implicated in a scam involving pilfering excess fabric from the production of military uniforms. He escaped conviction partly because tailors were a notoriously tight-knit group, and prosecutors could find no one willing to inform on their brother tradesmen.

It was probably through his trade club that Wedderburn first got into radical politics. Mentored by the renowned radical polymath Thomas Spence, he surged to the forefront of London’s militant political scene, rabble-rousing



Robert Wedderburn, born to an enslaved woman in Jamaica and pictured here in an 1824 engraving, witnessed numerous episodes of racist violence that helped shape his pugnacious tenacity when tackling injustice

COLLAGE BY **RACHEL DICKENS**

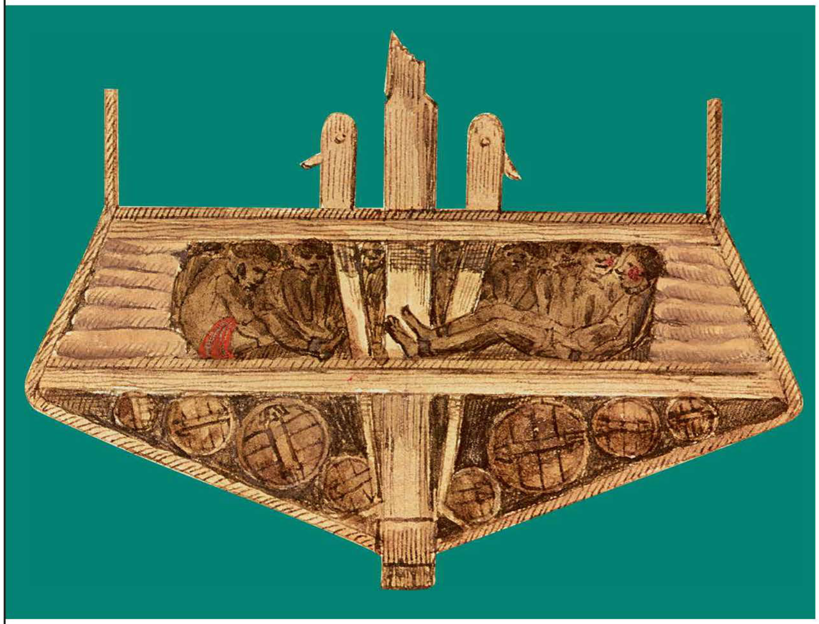
ALAMY/TOPFOTO/BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

in smoky pub back rooms and setting the world to rights. By the end of the 1810s, Wedderburn was publishing pamphlets and running his own debate club, the infamous 'Temple of Sedition' at a chapel in Hopkins Street, Soho.

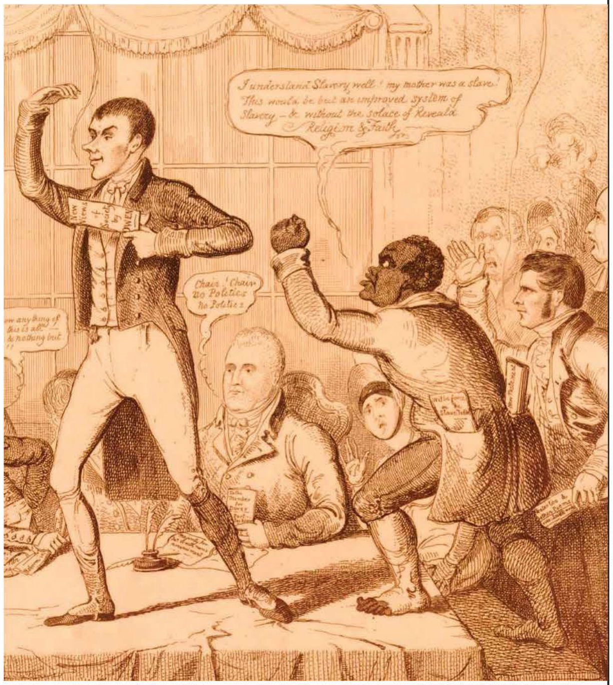
One of the most distinctive things about Wedderburn's politics was his ability to see the working-class struggle in global perspective. Most radicals of his generation were fixated on Britain: how to improve conditions for British workers, how to reform the British parliament, how to save the children of the British poor from the factories. Wedderburn addressed all of these issues, but also saw the cause of exploited white workers in Britain as inextricably entwined with that of enslaved black workers in the Caribbean and Africa. As he asked his predominately white readership in 1816, "should the receivers and stealers of Africans become rich, and buy one of those seats in the House of Commons, which is sold at noon-day, ought they to be called the representative of a free people? Ought they to be obeyed, when there is an opportunity to oppose with success?"

He even went so far as to encourage enslaved people to rise up and kill their 'masters', calling to mind the successful insurrection that led to the establishment of the free black nation of Haiti in the former French colony of Saint Domingue: "Prepare for flight, ye planters, for the fate of St Domingo awaits you," he wrote. "O ye planters, you know this has been done; the cause which produced former bloodshed still remains – of necessity similar effects must take place." No other British abolitionist had previously been so bold as to suggest that the enslaved should take their freedom for themselves.

When children challenged slavery
Ryan Hanley and Kathryn Gleadle introduce the young people who fought for abolition: *historyextra.com/children-abolition*



A cutaway illustration of a slave ship from the late 18th century. Robert Wedderburn remained committed to the abolition of slavery until the end of his life



I understand Slavery well! my mother was a slave! This would be but an improved system of Slavery – &c without the solace of Reveal'd Religion & Faith &c
Chair! Chair no Politics no Politics

A satirical 1817 print by George Cruikshank depicts Wedderburn (centre right) saying: "I understand slavery well! My mother was a slave!"

Such hot rhetoric about rebellion in the empire was alarming for the Home Office, increasingly paranoid about the rise of all forms of radicalism during the bitter recession that followed the Napoleonic Wars. But Wedderburn's domestic politics were what really landed him in hot water.

At a debate in 1819, he proclaimed that the Prince Regent deserved to die for failing to protect his subjects, shouting: "My motto is assassinate stab in the dark." He had already made a name for himself and, his actions reported by several government spies, came under the unforgiving scrutiny of the very highest ranks of the British establishment. In August 1819, the home secretary, Lord Sidmouth, personally wrote to the Prince Regent about "a man of the name of Wedderburne, a notorious firebrand", reassuring the future George IV that the troublemaker would soon be arrested. In February 1820, Wedderburn was convicted of seditious blasphemy for one of his Hopkins Street speeches, and served two years in Dorchester Jail.

Radical abolitionist

Prison proved extremely hard for Wedderburn. His hyper-visibility as a black man, as well as his notoriety as an enemy of the state, meant that he was singled out for especially harsh treatment by the guards at Dorchester. After his release, Wedderburn's life was marked by a steady decline into destitution and vice, including multiple convictions related to running brothels.

> “He left behind some of the most uncompromising anti-slavery and anti-racist writing of the 19th century”

Yet Wedderburn remained committed to the abolition of slavery. In 1824, he wrote his most famous text, *The Horrors of Slavery*, in which he described the injustices faced by his mother and grandmother. He wrote another anti-slavery tract, *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*, from a jail cell in 1831.

When he died in the winter of 1834–35, Wedderburn left behind some of the most uncompromising anti-slavery and anti-racist writing of the 19th century. Despite every conceivable disadvantage in life, he led the vanguard of the struggle for workers' rights across the empire, regardless of colour or creed. At its most utopian, his work dared readers to imagine a world in which solidarity, not profit or self-interest, could determine the course of history.

Wedderburn's final descent into criminality and vice forms a bitter coda to a grittily inspiring story, but in his final year he did at least get to see one of his cherished dreams become a reality. On 1 August 1834, after years of uprisings in the Caribbean and activism in Britain, the enslaved celebrated the first day of their legal freedom. Among them were several members of Wedderburn's immediate family. He might have derived some satisfaction from knowing that – though he also would have understood that legal emancipation was only the first step. The fight for equality was just beginning. H

Ryan Hanley is a senior lecturer at the University of Exeter, and author of *Robert Wedderburn: British Insurrectionary, Jamaican Abolitionist* (Yale University Press, 2025)

Listen to an episode of BBC Radio 4's **Britain's Black Past** exploring Wedderburn's story at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b07x6j4q*

BRIDGEMAN

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

READER RESEARCH

We want to know what *you* think

Don't miss out on your chance to have a say!
Simply visit: historyextra.com/reader-research

As a valued reader, we think it's really important we give you the chance to feedback about *BBC History magazine*, so we're inviting you to **take part in our reader research**. You'll have the opportunity to let us know your thoughts, and help us understand where we might be able to make changes or improvements.

As a thank you for taking part, UK residents who complete the online questionnaire will have the opportunity to enter a **prize draw for a chance to win one of two £100 John Lewis e-gift cards.***

We look forward to hearing from you!

WIN! £100 to spend at JOHN LEWIS

GETTY IMAGES

SCAN NOW or VISIT **historyextra.com/reader-research**

* T&Cs apply and are available from the questionnaire introduction page. The questionnaire will be available to complete until 11.59pm on April 21 2025.

“Matchless monst

La
Eliz
Presently lying under
to be Executed at E
the Horrid and Barb
Pathhead, by giving
on the 28th of April

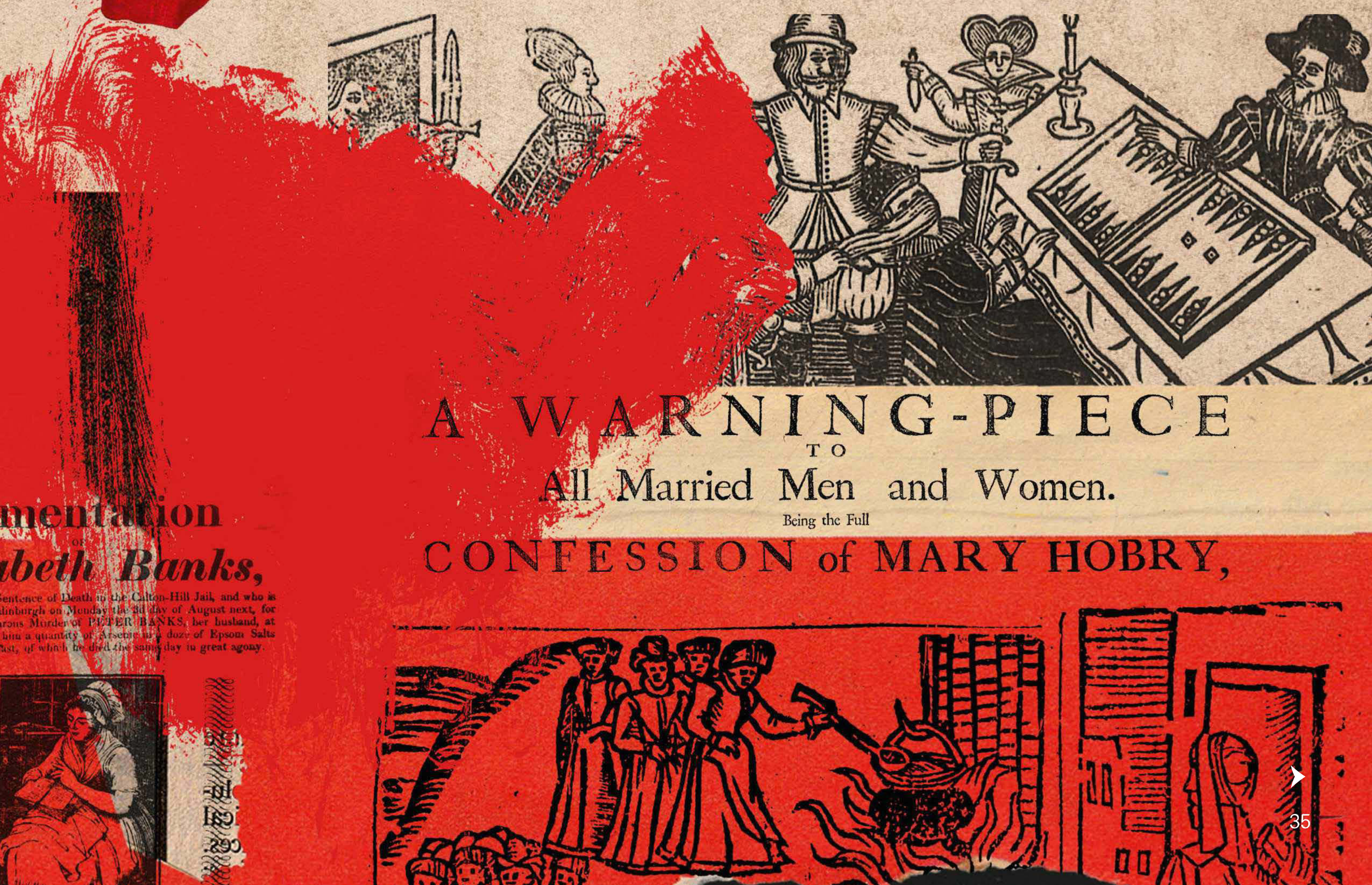
AN ACCOUNT OF SOME OF THE MOST HORRIBLE AND SHOCKING MURDERS AND DARING ROBBERIES EVER COMMITTED BY ONE OF THE FEMALE SEX.

ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE. ILLUSTRATION INCLUDES IMAGES FROM GETTY IMAGES

ters of the female sex”

Men committed most violent crimes in Tudor and Stuart England. But when women murdered, the press had a field day. **Blessin Adams** asks what drove society’s gleeful fascination with its “angels of death”

ILLUSTRATION BY **ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE**


A WARNING-PIECE
TO
All Married Men and Women.
Being the Full
CONFESSION of MARY HOBRY,
mentation
OF
abeth Banks,
Sentence of Death in the Calton-Hill Jail, and who is
dinburgh on Monday the 3d day of August next, for
arons Murder of PETER BANKS, her husband, at
him a quantity of Arsenic in a doze of Epsom Salts
fast, of which he died the same day in great agony.

ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

"Cruel and barbarous news from Cheapside," thundered the headline on a 1676 pamphlet. Read on, it invited, to be horrified by the tale of an "unhuman mistriss" who attempted to cook her apprentice alive on a spit. Another news piece from 1637, which was entitled "Natures Cruell Step-Dames: or, Matchlesse Monsters of the Female Sex", grimly recounted the "unnaturall murthering" of two innocent children by their mothers.

Such gruesome titles might not look so very out of place on today's newsstands and magazine racks. Like us, people in early modern Britain were fascinated by tales of true crime, murder and violent death. Pamphlets and broadside ballads describing the foul deeds of cold-blooded killers were hugely popular, and were sold on street corners, posted in public houses and even sung aloud to audiences – accompanied by surprisingly jolly tunes.

True crime was big business – and, in the literary marketplace of the 16th and 17th centuries, stories of the most extraordinary and bloody acts sold the greatest number of copies. Such murder pamphlets do not provide a realistic representation of crime in the early modern period. Instead, they reflected their readership's penchant for the crimes considered the most exciting or the most frightening – and, therefore, the most profitable.

The bestselling and most prolific genre of murder news featured female killers: wives who murdered their unwanted husbands; 'bastard-bearing' mothers who killed their babies to escape social disgrace; wicked witches who cast fatal spells on their neighbours. Such cases were vastly overrepresented in the literature, perhaps giving readers a distorted view of the threat posed by women.

At that time, men committed the majority of violent crimes and homicides. From tavern brawls to duels, male violence was ingrained in early modern society – so much so that it was deemed to be normal, even socially acceptable or desirable. Incidents in which that violence overspilled into the crime of murder were held to be deeply shocking but not entirely surprising.

Women, on the other hand, rarely committed violent crimes, and they rarely killed. So when they did, they were considered monstrous and strange, and became objects of intense fascination, believed to pose a genuine threat to society.

Nowhere is this bizarre moral standard more evident than in the reported cases of men and women who teamed up to commit gruesome acts of murder. In these accounts it is almost always the man who lands the killing blow. Yet, as the following case demonstrates – one that involves some shocking acts of violence – it is the woman who is later held accountable.

Inhuman acts

On Christmas Eve 1680, in Ratcliff, London, a seamstress named Leticia Wigington was in a furious temper. Her 13-year-old apprentice girl, Elizabeth Houlton, had transgressed in some small way, either by spoiling her work or by taking a few shillings, and so had to be punished. It was usual in this period for wayward wards to be physically corrected, however what was done to Elizabeth that night was an act of "inhuman barbarity" that went far beyond reasonable chastisement.

Leticia summoned her lodger, John Sadler, and persuaded him to help her punish young Elizabeth. John not only agreed, but he also took charge of what was to follow.

For almost an hour John carefully fashioned a whip called "a Cat with nine tails". This was an instrument designed to tear open the victim's skin as they were being flogged.

They stripped Elizabeth and tied her up by her wrists with whip-cords. John then proceeded to beat her "for 3 or 4 hours", while periodically "rubbing the wounds with salt". Leticia held Elizabeth tightly, and at one point stuffed an apron down her throat to block her "lamentable cries". Having fainted, Elizabeth was cut down and suffered for three days before dying of her wounds.

Both John and Leticia were guilty of torturing and murdering Elizabeth. However, it was clear that John had taken the leading part in the crime: he had made the murder weapon, he had tied Elizabeth up, and he had administered the deathblows.

The true-crime presses, though, were not especially interested in John. In their reporting of the case he was relegated to the role of an accessory, while Leticia was named as the principal murderer. On one pamphlet claiming to publish Leticia's confession, her name was emblazoned in large black letters across the front page: "Leticia Wigington of Ratclif… Condemned for whipping her Apprentice Girl to Death." This was followed by the author's unwavering conviction that all the evidence against her was "full, clear and undeniable". In his analysis of the case, the author does not mention John at all.

Another pamphlet reported that "Wigington… was indicted, and arraigned for whipping her apprentice girl to death… She having got one Sadler… to make a whip…" In another publication reporting on John's trial, it was written that "She [Leticia] got the prisoner [John] to help give her correction."

Crows and bleeding corpses Read Blessin Adams's article on how people in Tudor England used supernatural signs to unmask murderers: *historyextra.com/supernatural-signs*

NARRATIVE AND C
OF
UCRETIA P. CAN
HO WAS CONVICTED, AND SENT O BE
HUN EORGETOWN, DELAWAR
HER ACCOMPLI
TAINING

In these reports, Leticia was the murderous subject while John was simply a mindless object – no more than an extension of the murder weapon. He was depicted as a background figure who was just following orders. Leticia was the cunning, cruel and calculating murderess who may as well have been wielding the whip in her own hand.

When women killed, they were met with intense public hostility. Such women were seen as being unfeminine

Loud, bold and selfish

Early modern society was strictly hierarchical and patriarchal. Both men and women were held to rigid codes of conduct, and anyone who breached the boundaries of acceptable behaviour was viewed as subversive, even dangerous.

Women of all classes were expected to be subordinate citizens who owed absolute allegiance to the men in their lives: to their fathers, their masters and, especially, their husbands. A woman's role in society was that of the caregiver and the nurturer: she must be meek, mild and silent. To this end, writers of conduct books instructed women on the virtues of obedience and humility: "A wife must yeeld a chaste, faithfull, matrimoniall subjection to her husband."

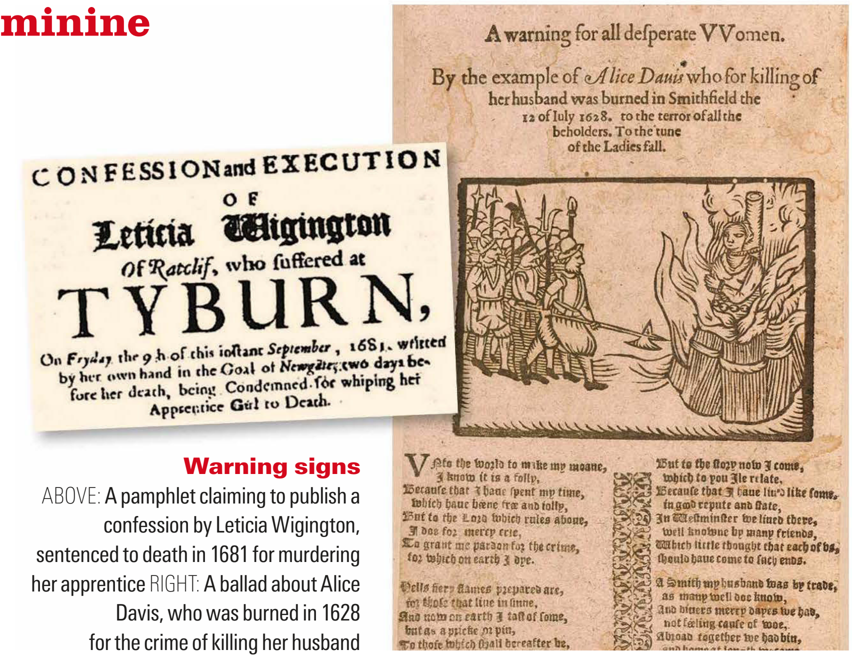
If a woman disobeyed the dictates regarding her gender – if she was loud, bold, selfish, sexually licentious or independent – then she was condemned for failing to play her part in the commonwealth. Such unruly behaviour undermined the very foundations of good society. When women killed, they were met with intense public hostility because they had, seemingly impossibly, transgressed the very laws of man, nature and God. Such women were seen as being unfeminine. Worse than that, they were inhuman.

The true-crime presses were obsessed with such 'inhuman' acts, and sometimes went to extraordinary lengths to shift the blame of violent, male-led homicides onto their female accomplices. One such case was reported to have taken place near Romsey in Hampshire in 1686.

William Ives was the landlord of a tavern called the Hatchet, where he lived with his wife, Esther, and their children. Theirs was not a faithful marriage: Esther was having an affair with the local cooper, a "Person of ill Fame" named John Noyse. It was salaciously reported that, in order to "make a freer way for their unlawful Lust", the adulterous pair conspired to do away with William.

On the night of 5 February, William stayed up late, until about one or two o'clock in the morning, getting blind drunk. At last, he staggered upstairs to bed and fell into a deep sleep. Sensing that their moment had arrived, John and Esther sneaked into his room with the intention to commit murder.

As William lay in a stupor, he was strangled with such force that his neck was broken. A close examination of the body revealed that "much violence appeared to be done to the neck… either by strangling or twisting; insomuch that the blood had issued from him



CONFESSION and EXECUTION
OF
Leticia Wigington
Of Ratclif, who ſuffered at
TYBURN,
On Fryday the 9 th. of this inſtant September, 1681. written by her own hand in the Goal of Newgate, two days before her death, being Condemned for whiping her Apprentice Girl to Death.

A warning for all deſperate VVomen.

By the example of *Alice Dauis* who for killing of
her husband was burned in Smithfield the
12 of Iuly 1628. to the terror of all the
beholders. To the tune
of the Ladies fall.

Vnto the world to make my moane,
I know it is a folly,
Becauſe that I haue ſpent my time,
which haue béene frée and iolly,
But to the Lord which rules aboue,
I doe for mercy crie,
To grant me pardon for the crime,
for which on earth I dye.

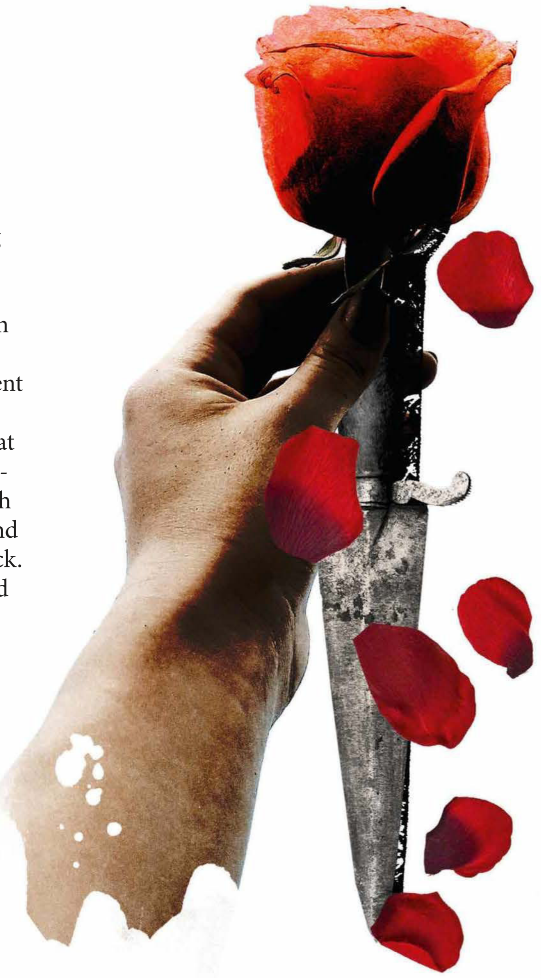
Hells fiery flames prepared are,
for thoſe that liue in ſinne,
And now on earth I taſt of ſome,
but as a pricke or pin,
To thoſe which ſhall hereafter be,

But to the ſtory now I come,
which to you Ile relate,
Becauſe that I haue liu'd like ſome,
in good repute and ſtate,
In Weſtminſter we liued there,
well knowne by many friends,
Which little thought that each of vs,
ſhould haue come to ſuch ends.

A Smith my husband was by trade,
as many well doe know,
And diuers merry dayes we had,
not féeling cauſe of woe,
Abroad together we had bin,

Warning signs
ABOVE: A pamphlet claiming to publish a confession by Leticia Wigington, sentenced to death in 1681 for murdering her apprentice RIGHT: A ballad about Alice Davis, who was burned in 1628 for the crime of killing her husband

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN



It was commonly believed that women had the power to seduce their menfolk into committing terrible crimes

in abundance, and stained the pillow…” William had evidently fought back against his assailant with much vigour, and a great deal of blood was shed. A passing bell-man later testified that he heard a voice shouting “What dost thou do to me, Noyse?”

John and Esther were arrested and later tried at the Lenten Assizes in Winchester on 24 February. In his defence, John blamed Esther, saying that she had provoked a violent quarrel with William, and that he had been obliged to intervene. Yet he did not deny that he was the one who had killed William – indeed, he could not. Only he had the strength to hold William down, to fight with him, and to apply the necessary force to break his neck. It was also his name that the bell-man heard the victim shouting. John was clearly the murderer, Esther his accessory.

The jury ruled that both John and Esther were equally guilty of the murder, and they were both sentenced to death. Yet when the case was later reported to the public, John and Esther’s roles had been completely reversed. One pamphlet headline dramatically pronounced “A most barbarous and bloody murther, committed by Esther Ives, with the assistance of John Noyse”.

The true-crime presses acknowledged that it was John who had broken William’s neck. However, they held Esther responsible for the killing, because she was the contaminating presence who had, by the very nature of her sex, set into motion this series of murderous events. She was the adulteress who had betrayed her husband; she was the seducer who had besotted the cooper; and she was the instigator who had caused an argument that had resulted in murder. It was she who led John astray and forced his hand; therefore, it was she who was to blame.

Persuasive powers

It was commonly believed that women, from Eve to Lady Macbeth, had the power to seduce and cajole their menfolk, seemingly against their wills, into committing terrible crimes. “Tis said, there is scarce any notorious sin,” wrote one contemporary theologian, “but a woman hath a hand in it.” People in the early modern period were particularly enthralled by tales of “lighte and lascivious women” who used their charms to achieve their murderous ends.

Such a case was reported in the year 1583, in the village of Cotheridge near Worcester. There lived an “honest” and “Godly” husbandman named Thomas Beast with his wife, who was simply named as Mrs Beast, and a “hansome Yonge” servant named Christopher Tomson. The familiar story goes that the older and more experienced Mrs Beast (that “harlot” and “wicked woman”) had taken control of the poor, innocent Christopher (that “sweet dallying freend” and “lusty yonker [youngster]”) by the power of her overwhelming sexuality.

Wholly fed up with married life and the constraints a husband put on her blossoming affair, Mrs Beast decided to be rid of Thomas. She convinced Christopher that once Thomas was dead, they would be free to enjoy each other without censure. Christopher was reluctant, but after a great deal of sweet-talk he was eventually persuaded to do the deed.

Having gotten her way, Mrs Beast sharpened a billhook and placed it into Christopher’s hand with the grim commandment “Be sure to hit him right.” Apparently left with no choice but to accept this charge, Christopher set off to find his master working in the fields. It was a cold and quick killing. When Thomas’s back was turned, Christopher struck him “in such cruel manner, [that] there he killed him”.

Soon afterwards the illicit lovers were arrested and placed in prison to await trial. During this time, it was said that Mrs Beast sought Christopher out and plied him with compliments and love-tokens, perhaps hoping he would spare her life by taking full responsibility for the crime. Her actions were noted, and condemned as yet another women’s trick. In the end her flattery did her no good, as she and Christopher were both tried, found guilty and sentenced to death.

The anonymous author of the true crime pamphlet reporting on these events did their best to enlarge Mrs Beast as a monstrous seductress, and to diminish Christopher as a victim who had been “besotted”, and by the “tirany of loove [sic] possessed” to act against his will. It was a common interpretation that reinforced the popular view that women were indeed dangerous forces of evil: “Oh most horrible and wicked womon, a woman, nay a devill.”

Readers may be struck by how little has changed in the depiction of female killers in our news and true crime media today. When women kill, or are accused of murder, their crimes are almost always highly publicised and sensationalised. The spectres of ‘monstrous mothers’, ‘angels of death’ and ‘black widows’ continue to inspire fear and disgust, and we still refer to female killers as unnatural or as traitors to their sex. In much the same way as our early modern forebears, we expect women to be victims rather than perpetrators of fatal violence.

Yet violence and murder are not the province of men alone, and while women are far less likely to commit acts of blood, it is entirely within their natures to do so.

Blessin Adams is a historian, author and former police investigator. Her new book, *Thou Savage Woman: Female Killers in Early Modern Britain* (William Collins), is available now

Lucy Worsley investigated the crimes of Victorian women for the BBC Sounds series **Lady Killers with Lucy Worsley**. Listen here: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0016pq3*

BBC SOUNDS

ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

HISTORY
EXTRA
ACADEMY

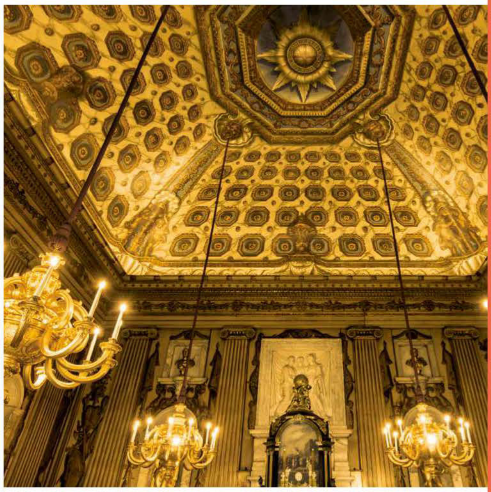
LIVE Q&A
on Tuesday 25 March

Become an instant expert with our six-week course

ROYAL RESIDENCES

Secrets and scandals

with Kate Williams



From imposing castles to decadent palaces, Britain's royal residences are packed with secrets, scandals and little-known stories. Join our new online history short course and let historian Kate Williams guide you through the doors of British royal residences, past and present – featuring video lectures, live Q&A sessions and more...

BBC History Magazine **subscribers can access our new history short courses for free. Find out more at *historyextra.com/academy***

DREAMSTIME

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

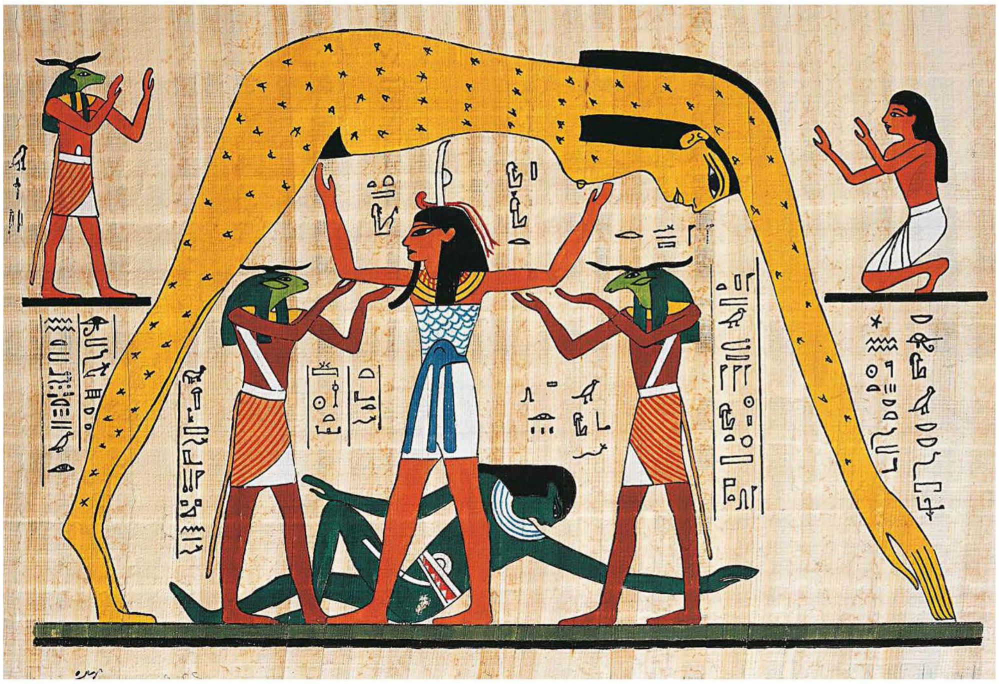
How did the ancient Egyptians believe that the world began?

The ancient Egyptians – the civilisation that flourished on the banks of the Nile from c3100 until Cleopatra's death in 30 BC – recognised about 1,500 gods. Their many cults provided varied explanations for the creation of the world, all considered equally valid. These followed the same basic plan: a chaotic time before creation was followed by the emergence of a creator god who made other gods and people and, in so doing, created order. However, the method described varied from cult to cult.

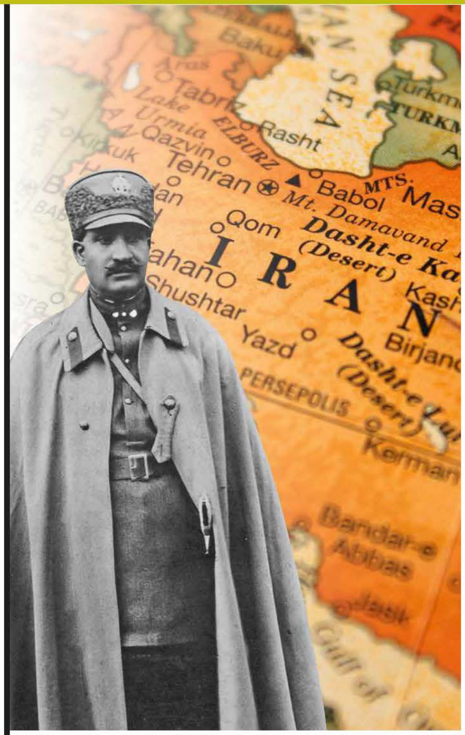
A person living in Memphis (now south of Cairo) would have learned the creation story featuring the craftsman god Ptah. Having created himself using intelligence and the spoken word, Ptah created the gods and the people. Someone living at Hermopolis Magna (al-Ashmunein) would learn from the priests of Thoth; for them, life started with four frog-headed gods and four snake-headed goddesses swimming in the primeval waters until a celestial goose laid an egg on a 'Mound of Flame'. On the island of Elephantine (Aswan), it was believed that the gods, people and their souls were created from mud by the ram-headed potter god Khnum.

The best-known creation myth belongs to the cult of the sun god Re of Heliopolis (northern Cairo). In the beginning, nothing existed but the waters of Nun. Deep within Nun there floated an egg holding a spark of life. Suddenly the egg cracked open and a mound rose up. Seated on that mound was Atum, god of light. Atum used his body fluids to create twin children, Shu (atmosphere) and Tefnut (moisture). The twins produced Geb (earth) and Nut (sky); this brother and sister then became the parents of the powerful deities Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Meanwhile, Atum cried, and his tears became the people of Egypt.

Professor Joyce Tyldesley, University of Manchester



A reconstructed tomb fresco depicts the Egyptian sky goddess Nut arched over her brother Geb (reclining), while held up by their father, Shu – all key figures in an ancient Egyptian creation myth



Reza Shah Pahlavi renamed his country Iran to add legitimacy to his reign

When did Persia become Iran?

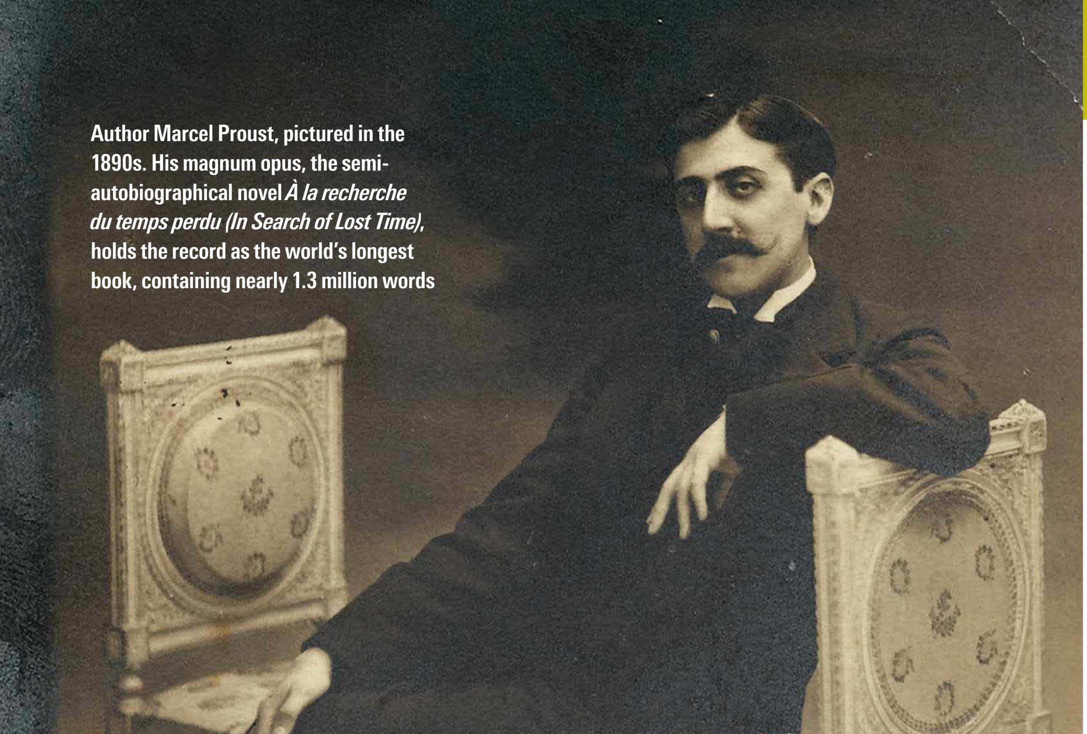
Officially, the land long known as Persia became Iran in March 1935. Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had taken power after a British-backed coup in 1921, made the change to present the country as a modern state with a clear national identity. The history of the name itself, however, is neither modern nor clear.

The Greeks coined the word 'Persia' for the Achaemenid empire founded in the sixth century BC by Cyrus the Great (which, incidentally, had little to do with the current borders of Iran). That name came from Parsa, the nomadic people from whom Cyrus came, and was widely adopted – although not by those actually living there. From the time of the Sasanian dynasty (AD 224–651), other names emerged including Arya and Eran, meaning 'Land of the Aryans' in reference to the peoples of the region. This then became Iran.

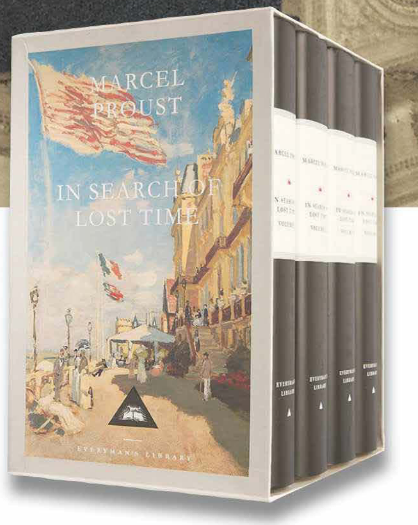
Reza Shah Pahlavi, then, took an ancient name to lend legitimacy to his own dynasty. However, fearing confusion with Iraq, the British Foreign Office used Persia in some internal correspondence until 1959.

Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



Author Marcel Proust, pictured in the 1890s. His magnum opus, the semi-autobiographical novel *À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time)*, holds the record as the world's longest book, containing nearly 1.3 million words



What is the longest book in the world?

Calculating the longest book throws up a number of questions: do you assess by word count, number of pages or total characters used (including punctuation and spaces)? Maybe it should be the book that would make the most impressive doorstop? And then what counts as a single book? There are more than 1 million words in JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but they're spread out over seven novels.

Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time)* was also published in seven parts, between 1913 and 1927, but is counted as a single novel. That's why, according to Guinness World Records, it is the longest book ever produced – running to around 9,609,000 characters and nearly 1.3 million words. For context, *War and Peace* – a title often invoked as one of the heftier reads – comes in at fewer than 600,000 words.

The French author's sprawling, semi-autobiographical work centres on an unnamed narrator, Proust himself, as he recalls everything from his earliest memories to his love affairs while trying to fit in with high society in Paris. More than simply that story, though, it's a rich and layered exploration of time and memory, truth and perception, the meaning of self and art, love and loss, joy and jealousy – the list of themes goes on. It also paints a portrait of 19th and early 20th-century society, politics and attitudes towards homosexuality. At its core is the narrator's struggle with the very act of writing a novel.

Initially, Proust failed to find a publisher for *À la recherche du temps perdu*, so he paid for the first part, *Swann's Way*, to be printed in 1913. The second of three planned instalments did not appear until after the First World War, by which time the novel had swollen to three times its original size. Proust became something of a recluse, shunning Parisian society so that he could focus entirely on his writing.

Proust died of pneumonia on 18 November 1922, aged just 51, with his magnum opus critically acclaimed but unfinished. It fell to his brother Robert to edit and publish the final three parts, concluding with *Time Regained* in 1927. Proust's most prominent work soon became enshrined as a landmark of 20th-century literature – as well as the world's longest book. ***JW***

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

DID YOU KNOW…?

The secret in the seal

Just before the end of the Second World War, a delegation from the Young Pioneer Organisation of the Soviet Union presented the US ambassador in Moscow with a gift: a wooden carving of the Great Seal of the United States, which he hung up in the study of his official residence. What he did not know – and nor did the three ambassadors who followed him – was that the 'gift' contained a bugging device enabling Soviet spies to listen in. The bug was discovered in 1952.

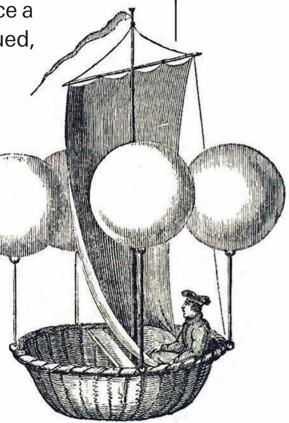
Journey of imagination

The Cruise of the Kawa: Wanderings in the South Seas by Walter E Traprock was a travel book, published in 1921, which purported to describe a recent expedition in the Pacific. This claimed to have discovered a previously unknown inhabited archipelago that Traprock named the Filbert Islands – but it was a hoax. The list of Traprock's other books, which included *Who's Hula in Hawaii* and *Around Russia on Roller Skates,* ought to have tipped off readers, yet many newspapers reviewed it seriously.

High ambitions

In 1670, an Italian priest named Francesco Lana de Terzi devised a flying ship. Making use of discoveries enabling the creation of vacuums, Terzi proposed a vessel with five masts, four of which would have a sphere of thin copper foil attached to them. Air would be pumped from the spheres to produce a vacuum so, Terzi argued, the ship would rise because the spheres would be lighter than the surrounding air. The vacuum ship was never built, though a design survives.

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



A 19th-century engraving of Francesco Lana de Terzi's design for a flying boat lifted by spheres containing vacuums

WHY DO WE SAY…

… You're such a snob?

▶▶▶ Modern English owes William Makepeace Thackeray one phrase, 'vanity fair', and one word, 'snob'. He did not coin either of them, but he did make them famous in *The Book of Snobs* – a collection of satirical pieces first published in *Punch*, then as a standalone volume in 1848.

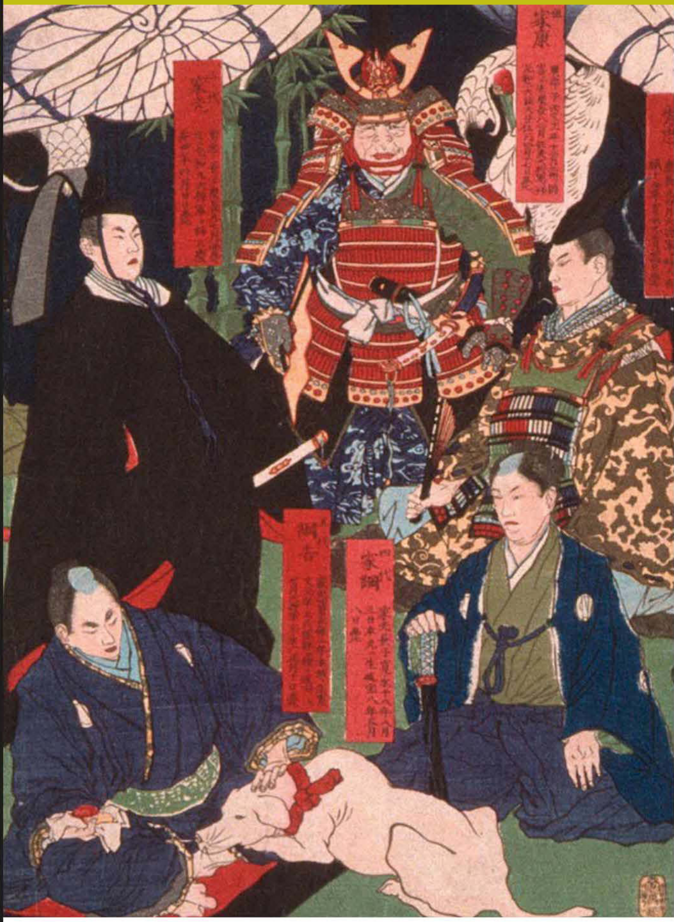
The word has since been used widely to mean people who obsequiously "bow forward but kick backward", and has entered multiple languages. English also features the abstract noun snobbery. However, before Thackeray popularised it, the word 'snob' had surfaced in printed texts as a slang term for a person of low social status.

Predictably, itinerant labourers – though indispensable and valued – were looked down upon. Tailors and cobblers were commonly dubbed 'snobs'. As late as 1875, a man asked a boy in the industrial school at Castle End, Cambridge, whether he had learned tailoring. "No, sir," he answered, "I'm a snob" – meaning that he was a cobbler. At some points, 'snob' denoted anyone who worked for his living.

There's a legend that it originated with the writing of the Latin *sine nobilitate* ('not of noble birth') in the documents of incoming students of non-aristocratic origin at Cambridge and Oxford. But this is a poor joke, as the great etymologist Walter W Skeat noted. The true origin of 'snob' is unknown, but it probably emerged as an expressive word like *snip*, snap, snoop, snub, snot and a host of others.

Anatoly Liberman, professor and author of *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN McBETH**



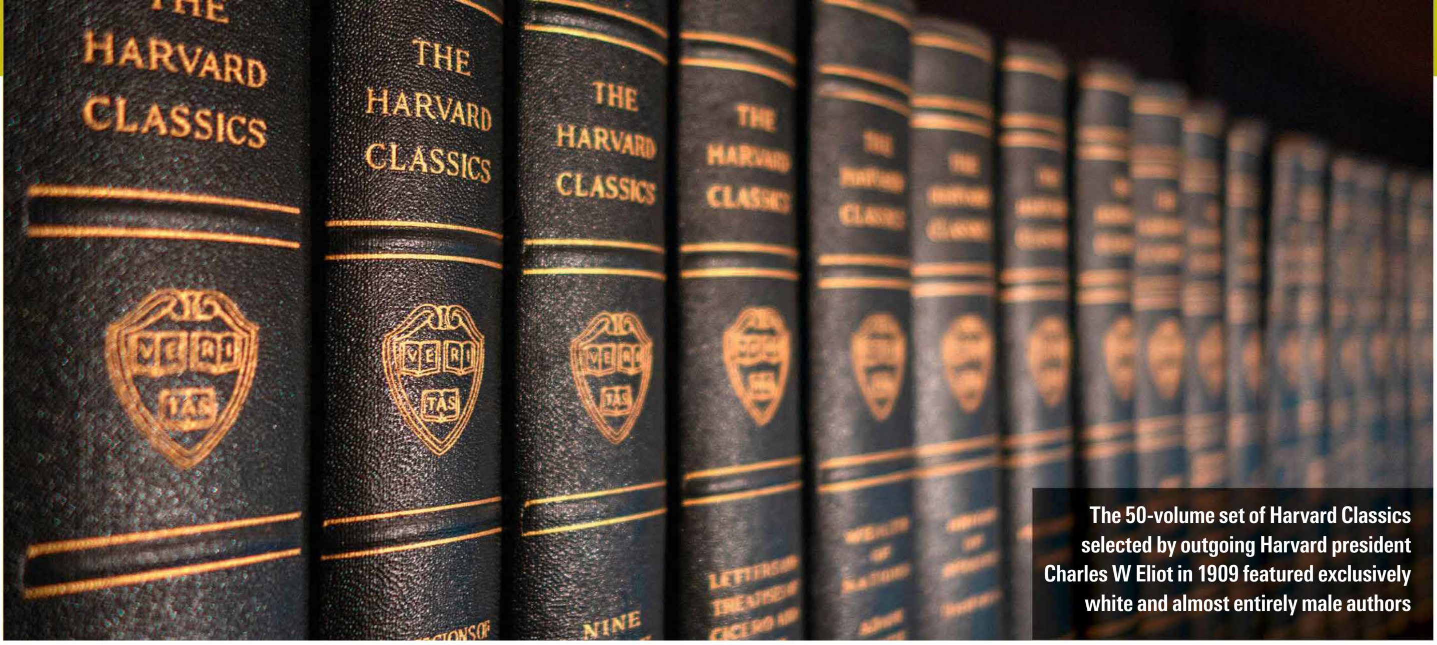
A 19th-century painting depicts some of the 15 Tokugawa shoguns who headed the military dictatorship that ruled Japan for more than two and a half centuries

What was Japan's Edo Period?

▶▶▶ For more than 260 years, from 1603 to 1867, Japan was ruled not by an emperor but by a hereditary military dictatorship: the Tokugawa shogunate. Following decades of near-constant civil war, the powerful warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu seized control and forced the emperor to grant him the title of shogun. He thus became de facto ruler of Japan, with the emperor remaining only as a ceremonial figurehead. The Edo Period was named for the seat of the shogun – Edo, now called Tokyo.

This was a time of relative peace, stability, urbanisation and economic growth, albeit achieved through strict enforcement of social order and rigid adherence to court etiquette. Social mobility between the four classes – warriors, peasants, artisans and merchants – was prohibited. It was also a time of international isolationism, with Japan all but cut off from foreign influence until 1853 when four American naval vessels – the so-called 'Black Ships' – entered Edo Bay and forced the country to open up to international trade. A rebellion soon broke out and returned imperial rule to Japan with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. ***JW***

GETTY IMAGES



The 50-volume set of Harvard Classics selected by outgoing Harvard president Charles W Eliot in 1909 featured exclusively white and almost entirely male authors

When did the idea of 'the classics' become established?

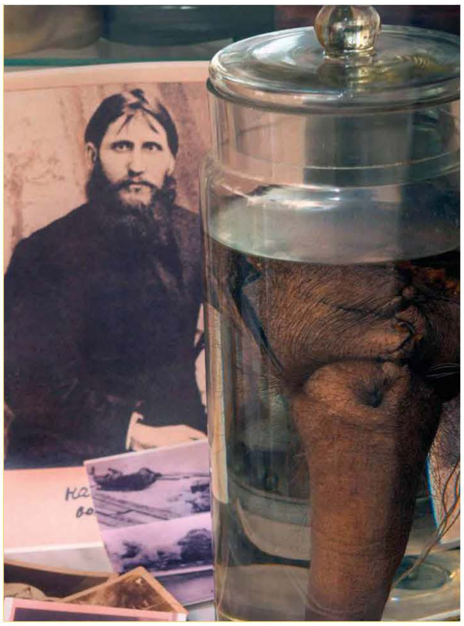
In the second century AD, the Roman author Aulus Gellius spent his nights compiling literary quotations. As his compendium grew, he felt the need for a metaphor to distinguish those writers he considered particularly important – and he chose to use a tax band. There were six tax brackets in ancient Rome; the wealthiest citizens were the *classici*, the aristocrats. Gellius called his favourite writers the *scriptores classici*, thus coining the idea of literary 'classics' – giving it, from the start, associations of elitism as well as antiquity.

For centuries, antiquity was essential: only Greek and Latin authors were considered 'classics'. In the 19th century, however, scholars began to extend the definition to include early modern writers such as Dante, Shakespeare and Cervantes. Since the 20th century, when the term was adopted by publishers as a marketing tool, the need for a work to endure through time has lessened, with new categories invented such as 'modern classics' and even the 'instant classic'.

The classics have traditionally been associated with the idea of a canon – a universally accepted list of great books. It reached a peak in 1909, when the outgoing president of Harvard University, Charles W Eliot, marketed a 50-volume set of 'Harvard Classics'. He intended to supply everything that "seemed essential to the 20th-century idea of a cultivated man", but today his selection looks hopelessly blinkered: his 300 authors were exclusively white and overwhelmingly male.

It is no longer possible for someone like Gellius or Dr Eliot to read enough literature in a lifetime to declare a definitive list of classics. The most we can aspire to is a personal canon. As Italian author Italo Calvino said: "All that can be done is for each one of us to invent our own ideal library of our classics."

Henry Eliot, author of *The Penguin Classics Book* (Particular Books, 2018)



ALAMY

A penis displayed at the St Petersburg Museum of Erotica reputedly belonged to the notorious mystic Rasputin – though it almost certainly didn't

What happened to Rasputin's penis?

When the St Petersburg Museum of Erotica opened in 2004, one of it star exhibits was a 12-inch-long pickled penis. That penis allegedly belonged to that infamous Russian mystic and confidant of the Romanov family, Grigori Yefimovich Novykh – better known as Rasputin.

In truth, it's unlikely that this impressive member was ever attached to Rasputin. Rumours that the 'mad monk' was mutilated in this manner during his assassination in 1916 were quashed when an autopsy, carried out shortly afterwards, confirmed that his penis was still in place. Nonetheless, people continued to insist that Rasputin's gigantic genitals had been preserved for posterity, fuelled by rumours that the so-called holy man was a well-endowed group-sex enthusiast and prolific seducer of married noblewomen – including Empress Alexandra.

The name Rasputin actually means 'debauched one'. After he rose to prominence within Russia's royal court, he was accused of various inappropriate sexual antics by his enemies, including holding wild orgies with his followers. The scandalous rumour that he was having an affair with the tsarina was particularly damaging, and fuelled resentment against the Romanovs. However, he probably wasn't the "lover of the Russian queen", as the Boney M song claimed. Alexandra was devoted to Rasputin not because of his sexual prowess but for his seeming ability to help her son overcome debilitating bouts of haemophilia.

One apocryphal tale claims that, after the infamous organ was removed, Russian expatriates in Paris worshipped it as a fertility totem in the 1920s. The most likely – though far more dull – truth is that Rasputin's penis was cremated in 1917, along with the rest of his body. H

Hilary Mitchell, freelance journalist

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

Save when you subscribe to the digital edition

TUDOR ENGLAND'S 'ANGELS OF DEATH'
The 16th-century obsession with female killers
HISTORY MAGAZINE
BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
£6.99 / April 2025 / www.historyextra.com
THE FINAL MYSTERY OF RICHARD III
How 21st-century science cracked a 500-year-old cold case
Liquor, loot and death on the high seas
A hell-raising history of piracy
Was Charles I really a tyrant?
HISTORY'S FIRST BLACK SUPERSTAR
Josephine Baker's extraordinary life as a singer, dancer – and spy
CLEOPATRA'S FECK
How Ptolemy XII brought anc
CHURC
IS HE STILL GREATEST BI
2024's BEST HISTORY BOOKS CHOSEN BY OUR EXPERTS
WHO KILLED THE KING OF SCOTS?
The medieval murder mystery that's yet to be solved
OTHER PRINCE IN THE TOWER
Henry VII killed Richard III's tragic nephew
PLUS THE LONG ROOTS OF THE BRITISH FAR RIGHT
ROME'S MONSTROUS EMPERORS
The triumph of the Anglo-Saxons
Reagan's American dream

Enjoy our Premium App experience now available from

GET IT ON Google play

zinio™

amazon apps Available on kindle fire

Download on the App Store

BBC History Magazine is Britain's bestselling history magazine. We feature leading historians writing lively and thought-provoking new takes on the great events of the past.

"Matchless
monsters
of the female sex"
Men committed most violent crimes in Tudor and Stuart England. But when women murdered, the press had a field day. Blessin Adams asks what drove society's gleeful fascination with its "angels of death"
A WARNING-PIECE TO All Married Men and Women.
CONFESSION of MARY HOBRY,
Lamentation
Elizabeth Banks,
BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE
TUDOR ENGLAND'S 'ANGELS OF DEATH'
THE FINAL MYSTERY OF RICHARD III
How 21st-century science cracked a 500-year-old cold case

Enjoy our Premium App experience now available from

GET IT ON Google play

zinio™

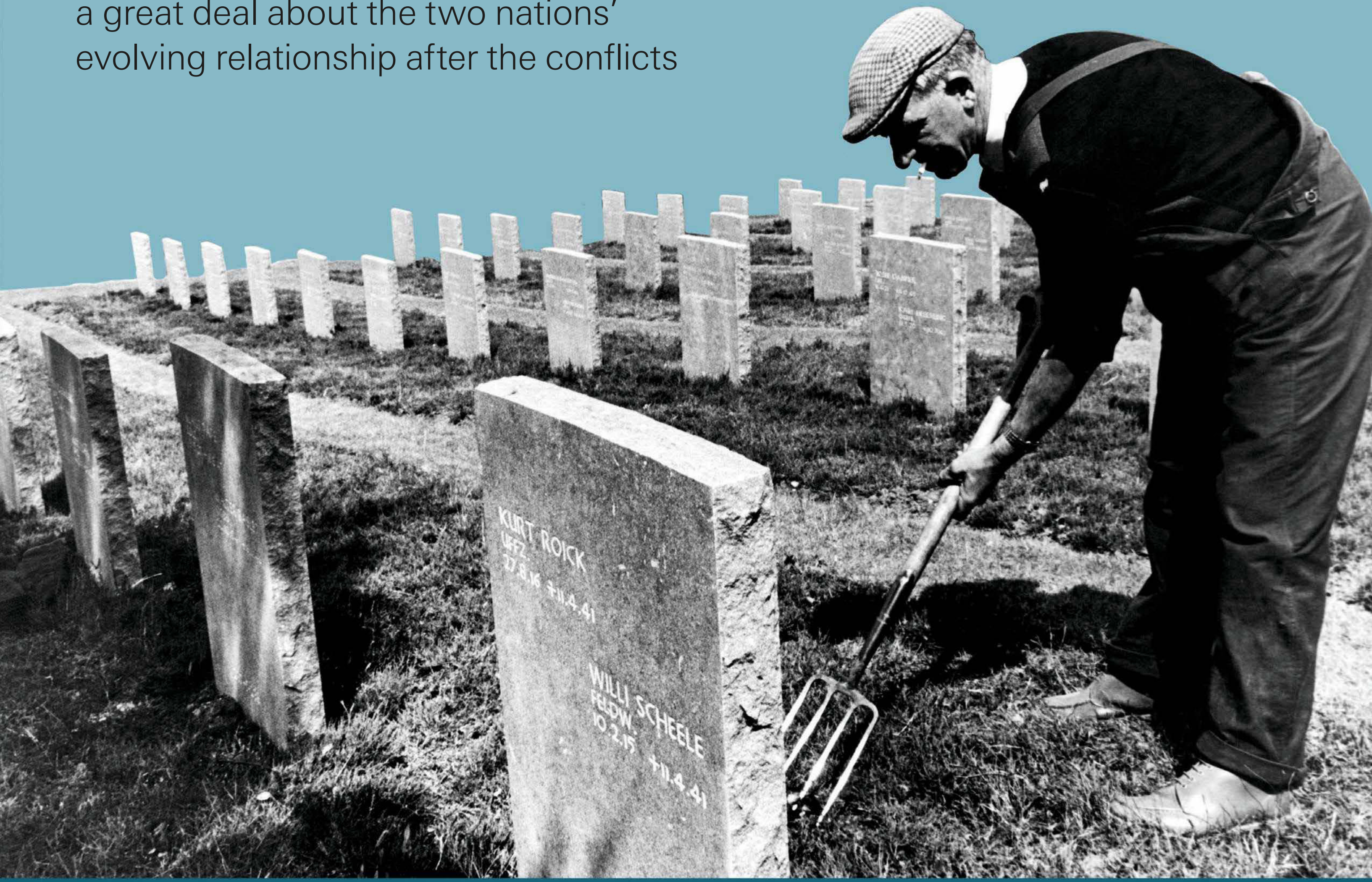
amazon apps Available on kindle fire

Download on the App Store

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

WHAT TO DO W

Tens of thousands of British and German servicemen died on enemy soil during the two world wars. What happened to their remains, writes **Tim Grady**, tells us a great deal about the two nations' evolving relationship after the conflicts

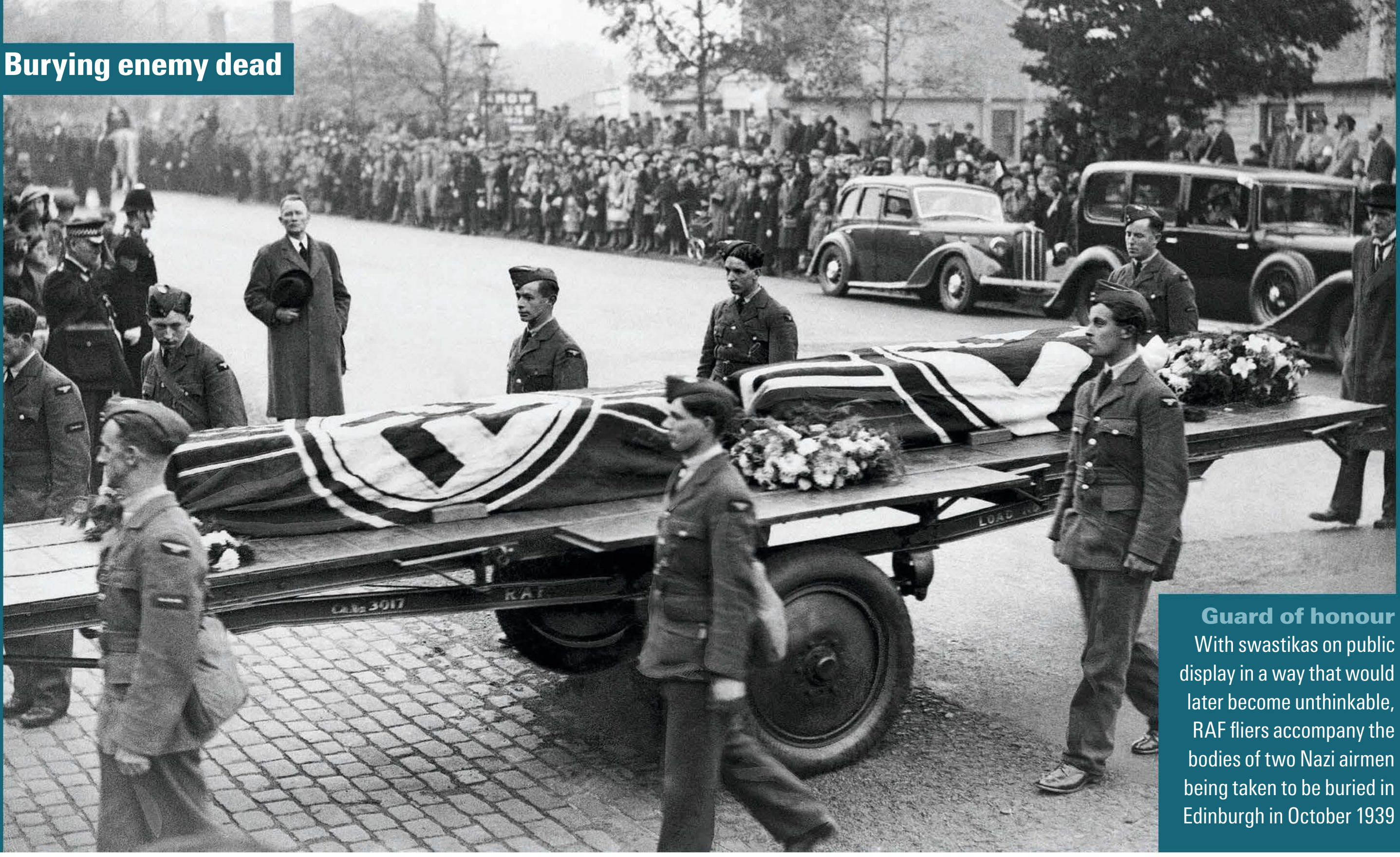


ITH THE DEAD?

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **The British and Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Berlin, where some of those who lost their lives in 1939–45 are buried; tidying German war graves on Cannock Chase c1956; the remains of fallen soldiers are relocated to Tyne Cot Cemetery, Flanders in 1920. At this time, many of the British dead in Germany were buried in local cemeteries**

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Burying enemy dead



Guard of honour
With swastikas on public display in a way that would later become unthinkable, RAF fliers accompany the bodies of two Nazi airmen being taken to be buried in Edinburgh in October 1939

Thousands of people lined the streets of Edinburgh in October 1939 hoping to catch a glimpse of the day's big event. Finally, the sound of an RAF pipe band could be heard, and a slow-moving funeral cortege came into view. Once safely inside the city's Portobello Cemetery, a military chaplain gave a poignant eulogy to the assembled crowd, and local dignitaries laid wreaths for "two brave airmen".

Although rarely on this scale, such scenes were repeated time and again during the Second World War. What marked this ceremony out as somewhat different, however, was that the flags on the coffins were not Union Jacks, but Nazi swastikas. The mourners in the Scottish capital were well aware of this. After all, they had come to witness the burial of two Germans killed in a battle over the Firth of Forth five days earlier.

International law stated the enemy needed to be "honourably buried", but a grand military funeral was never a part of the deal. If it was not a question of legality, then, what had encouraged such fanfare in Edinburgh?

The real motive, it seems, was to be found over in Nazi Germany. During the first days of the conflict, several British airmen had lost their lives in a series of audacious RAF raids on Germany's North Sea ports. Determined to showcase an honourable side, the Nazi regime staged its own elaborate funerals in the coastal town of Wilhelmshaven, Lower Saxony. A naval band, floral tributes and military pallbearers were all present as the British dead were laid to rest. After the Germans had thrown down this mortuary gauntlet, the British clearly decided they had little option but to follow suit.

Behind every enemy funeral and every enemy grave lay a wider history of loss

These funerals shed light on an important, though largely overlooked, aspect of the two world wars: the enemy dead. During both conflicts, enemy soldiers and civilians lost their lives on the British and German home fronts. Roughly 2,700 Germans died in First World War Britain and around 4,500 in the second conflict. When it came to British deaths in Germany, the numbers were even higher: 6,500 in the Great War and more than 25,000 from 1939–45.

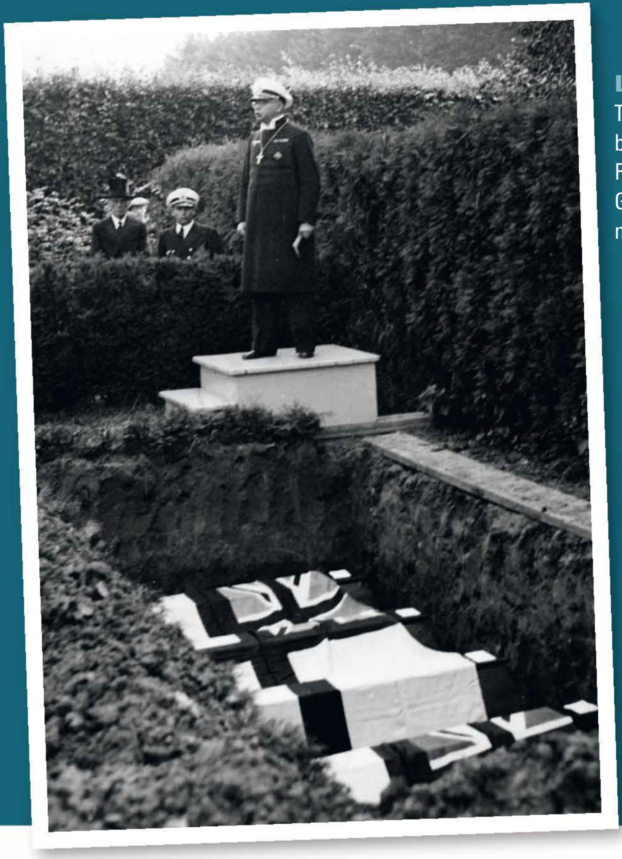
Us and them

Both societies have been very good at commemorating their own wartime losses. Such concerns have rarely stretched to the lives lost from the other side – perhaps for understandable reasons. Yet behind every enemy funeral and every enemy grave also lies a wider history of loss, grief and broken families.

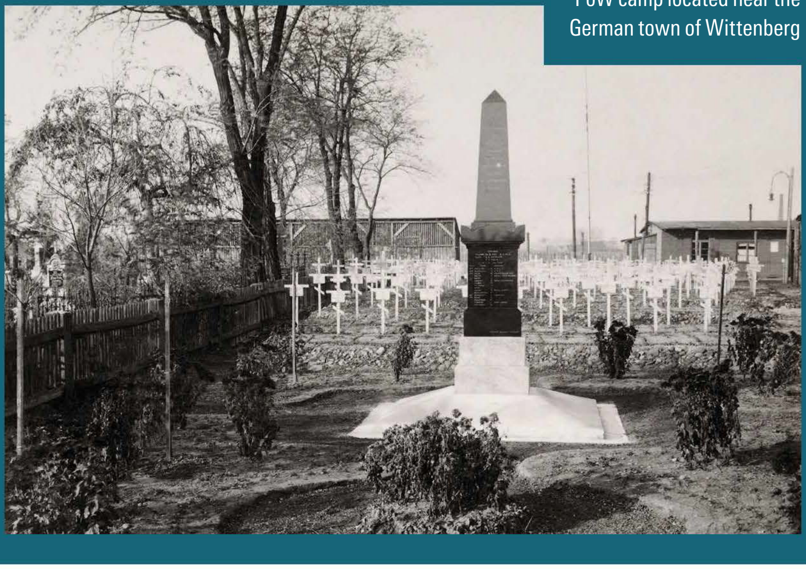
During the Second World War, the majority of enemy deaths on the home front occurred in the air. The impressive funerals in Edinburgh and Wilhelmshaven were for airmen who were shot down in the skies over Britain and Germany. The balance of deaths in the First World War, however, where air combat played a much smaller role, was very different. In this earlier conflict, the largest number of enemy deaths occurred in PoW camps. But even then, given the vast size of the British and German camp networks, the numbers were still small.

Accidents, sickness and disease were the most common causes of mortality in PoW camps. One of those to suffer such a fate was 26-year-old Friedrich Borutta, a German prisoner originally from industrial Bochum. As a PoW, he ended up in Kinlochleven, a community just south of Ben Nevis. According to a Red Cross report, Borutta was "killed instantaneously" in October 1916, when he "was struck on [the] head by a portion of a hut" as a storm ripped through the Kinlochleven working camp. Some months later, in March 1917, another young German, Eugen Baumann, died in Middlesbrough. A lump of metal "the size of a man's fist" struck his head while he was labouring away on a massive slag heap.

ALAMY



Lost over Germany
The respect shown in Edinburgh may have been related to events in Wilhelmshaven when RAF men were shot down during a raid over Germany in September 1939. Here, a German naval dean delivers a speech at the funeral



Deadly outbreak
A vintage postcard shows the memorial to those who died in a 1915 typhus epidemic that engulfed a PoW camp located near the German town of Wittenberg

What proved even more deadly for PoWs in both countries was the global influenza pandemic of 1918–19. The tight confines of the camps offered the virus rich pickings. Yorkshire's Skipton camp was among those to feel the full force of the disease: 47 men lost their lives in little more than three weeks.

Over in Germany, the influenza pandemic was also a killer, but so too were the poor sanitary conditions that reigned in many camps. One of the very worst places to be held was probably the Wittenberg camp, where typhus started to spread during the first half of 1915. But it was the German response, or lack of it, that caused the greatest problems. Fearing they would become infected, the guards effectively abandoned the camp, only passing basic supplies through the border fence. At the peak of the typhus epidemic, the men were living in squalor, "alive with vermin" as a UK parliamentary committee reported. The "horrors of Wittenberg" left 60 British and 400 other PoWs dead.

A duty of care

Regardless of how the enemy died in the two world wars, the British and German authorities faced the same issue. With every death, they inherited another body that required some form of burial. One option was to create special cemeteries reserved solely for the enemy dead. However, this required time, effort and money, all of which were in short supply in wartime. Nonetheless, a handful of new cemeteries were developed, including one in Wittenberg for the typhus victims. In Britain, new PoW burial grounds were built for the Stobs camp in the Scottish borders and the Park Hall camp near Oswestry, where a large memorial mound cast a watchful shadow over the 109 German graves.

A second option for the burial of enemy bodies – which became by far the most common approach – was to make use of existing cemeteries. After all, there seemed little reason to create a brand new burial ground if there was already plenty of space in nearby parish churchyards or in municipal cemeteries.

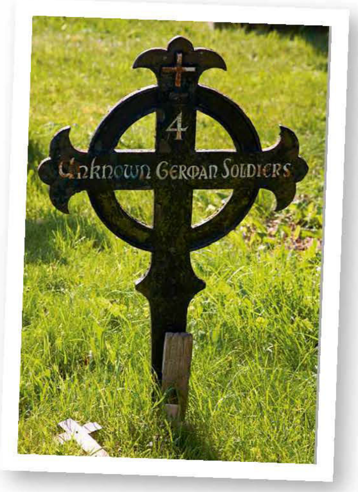
The recovery and burial of a German bomber crew who had lost their lives in Withyham, Sussex in 1941 was fairly typical of the process. The aircraft, a Heinkel He 111, was returning to base from a bombing raid over London when a British fighter attacked. Two crew members bailed out and another three died as the aircraft smashed into the ground. Some "not identifiable" remains, as the police report put it, were pulled from the "burnt-out machine" and subsequently buried in Withyham parish churchyard. A fourth German – one of the men to have bailed out – died on the way to hospital in Tunbridge Wells and was then buried in the town's municipal cemetery.

During the two world wars, the burial of the enemy in local cemeteries, such as Withyham and Tunbridge Wells, occurred time and again. Sometimes it was just the odd grave that appeared. In King's Lynn, for example, the remains of Frank Zielenski, another victim of the influenza pandemic, lay quietly in the town's main cemetery, surrounded by ordinary family graves. In other burial grounds, the enemy had a much greater presence: Manchester's Southern Cemetery contained 154 German dead from the First World War, later joined by eight servicemen from the Second.

Simmering anger

After the two conflicts, more than 700 different British cemeteries contained enemy graves. There is no accurate number for Germany, but given the scale of death, the numbers must have been even greater.

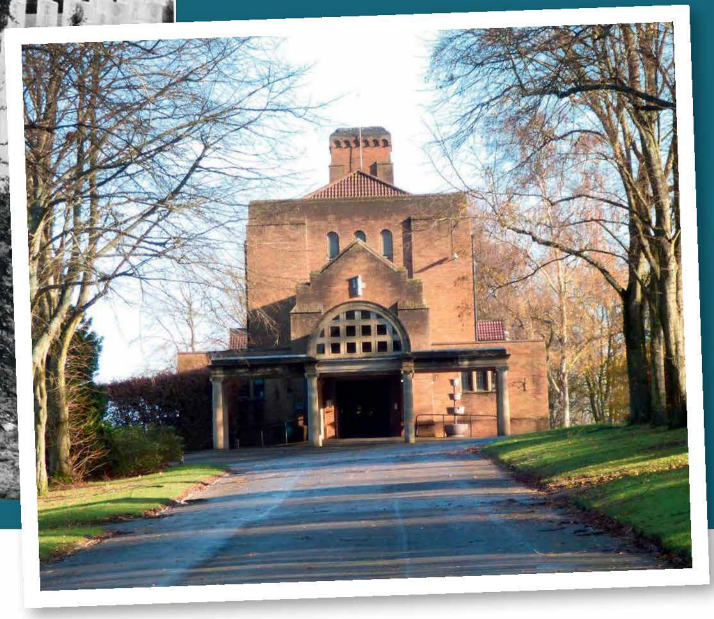
Eighteen-year-old Donald Stephens died in Landshut, north of Munich in September 1918, a matter of weeks before the end of the war. Buried in the town's wooded



The graves of German servicemen can still be found in British churchyards, such as this memorial to an unknown soldier at Tarrant Monkton in Dorset

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

After the guns have fallen silent Paying respect at the British Military Cemetery in Hamburg in 1957, a site where more than 2,500 Commonwealth troops are buried



Enemy honoured Lodge Hill cemetery in Birmingham. On Armistice Day in the 1920s, wreaths were laid on the graves of the 14 German war dead buried here

cemetery, Stephens rested inconspicuously alongside German family graves. He was far from alone: fallen British soldiers lay scattered in hundreds of cemeteries in the heart of local German communities.

Coming face to face with a dead enemy was certainly less threatening than confronting a live one. Perhaps for this reason, local people rarely put up too much of a fuss when their vanquished foe was carried to the grave in their own communities. One Dorset woman watching the burial of a German PoW in First World War Dorchester captured the sentiment of many people. "I only hope that in Germany they treat our men as well and pay as much respect to those who die," she shouted out as the coffin was carried to the grave.

However, not every funeral passed off without anger being expressed. The strongest complaints were generally reserved for airmen killed in bombing raids. In Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, according to a police report, the vicar found himself "threatened with a riot" after he agreed to the burial of "German murderers" in September 1916. The 15 men in question were the crew of a raiding German airship that had been shot down in flames in neighbouring Cuffley. Meanwhile, one Newcastle resident was so incensed at the scale of a German funeral held locally that he vented his anger in the press. "It is time we treated these men for what they are: cold blooded murderers," he raged.

As the Allied bombing of German urban areas intensified, any empathy with dead or dying enemy airmen also quickly faded. In Nazi Germany, people's anger sometimes went far beyond a letter to the local newspaper. When a Lancaster bomber hit the ground in the tiny village of Schlalach, south of Potsdam, in 1943, there was very little left of the "badly burned" crew. Yet the attacks still continued. Some local workers took the corpses to the village churchyard, where they threw the bodies into a mass grave, imitating "the noise of falling bombs" as each body hit the ground.

Communities often took a close interest in the care of enemy graves

Commemorating the enemy

In both 1918 and 1945, when the fighting finally stopped, wartime societies, militaries and economies were gradually demobilised. Yet, while the living could slowly return, the dead remained overseas, scattered in local cemeteries from Aldershot to York and Aachen to Xanten. But what was to happen to these enemy graves post-conflict? Unsurprisingly, many of the bereaved were desperate to have their loved ones' bodies brought home.

Elizabeth Stark's circumstances were particularly sad. In September 1918, her son James had succumbed to wounds while being held in Cologne. A few weeks later her husband also died. She then made it her mission to "get their boy's body home" to Dundee. Despite years of campaigning, she eventually had to admit defeat. Her husband's headstone in Scotland contains a dedication to their son, but his body remained in Germany.

While discussions over the possible repatriation of the enemy dead rumbled on, the graves themselves started to enjoy a second life. This came down to having a presence. People found it difficult to ignore the enemy, when their graves were still in the midst of communities. One Suffolk soldier, Willie Read, had perished in the influenza pandemic and lay buried in the town of Rüthen. A local farmer, who had employed Read, promised his family he would keep the grave "in proper condition".

Sometimes, local people included the enemy in their early war commemorations. The 14 German dead in Birmingham's Lodge Hill cemetery, for example, were treated the same as the neighbouring British war graves. On Armistice Day during the 1920s, wreaths were laid on both sets of graves. It was, the German embassy proclaimed somewhat optimistically, a "sign of the growing mutual understanding between the nations of Europe".

GETTY IMAGES/IWM

Gathered together Graves at the cemetery on Cannock Chase, Staffordshire. Nearly 5,000 German and Austrian dead from the First and Second World Wars are buried at the site

With local communities taking such a close interest in the care of enemy graves, direct contact between the former foes often followed. One of the most poignant stories emerged on the south coast of England, where 11 German airmen of the Second World War lay buried in Poole's Parkstone Cemetery. Frau Koch, the widow of Horst Gündel, one of those killed, made regular trips to the cemetery postwar. On one of these visits, she ended up in conversation with a local man. The pair kept in touch and a warm friendship developed. They exchanged letters and Christmas cards, arranged flowers for Gündel's grave and their families stayed together on holiday.

New resting places

Yet these warm relations were not to last. While the British and Germans were busy bonding over the enemy war graves, the authorities started to plot a very different future for the dead. Both sides eventually decided to move their graves from hundreds of scattered sites to a far smaller number of new military cemeteries, which gathered together the fallen on foreign soil. On paper, there was a lot of logic to such plans. It brought each country's dead together for the first time – and, of course, centralising the graves also cut down on maintenance costs. The knock-on effect, however, was that once the graves were gone, the bereaved no longer needed to visit communities that had once cared for the dead. And thus, these early relations slowly fizzled out.

The enemy graves vanished from the cemetery landscapes at different times. The British moved first, exhuming all their dead in Germany in two large waves, one in the mid-1920s and one in the late 1940s for the Second World War graves. These were massive operations. The exhumation teams often covered hundreds of miles in a day, moving tens of bodies each time. "With such enormous distances," as one of the gravediggers later recalled, "our lives seemed to revolve round transport."

Yet, while the British dead were gradually moved, there was no such progress with the scattered German graves. This was not for a lack of trying. The problem for successive German governments was that, as the vanquished power, they had less control of the graves in Britain. It was only in 1959 that the situation finally changed: a new international treaty gave the West German state permission to exhume all German graves on British soil.

The West Germans welcomed this development as a sign of rehabilitation. Of course, this rather overlooked the fact that many of the German dead had led anything but normal lives. On the one side were unsavoury characters such as Maximilian von Herff (1893–1945), a Waffen-SS general who had died after suffering a stroke while being held as a PoW in Cumbria. On the other side were the graves of refugees who had fled the Nazis and been interned, only then to lose their lives in wartime Britain.

Such complexities were of little concern when the gravediggers set to work. The Germans moved all of their dead to a new military cemetery on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, matching the British who had developed four cemeteries for their First World dead (in Berlin Stahnsdorf, Cologne, Hamburg and Kassel), with 11 more added after the second conflict.

Today, the enemy dead lie quietly in these vast cemeteries, all beautifully tended by the British and German war graves commissions. Few now remember that the enemy graves were anywhere other than on Cannock Chase or in one of the British cemeteries on German soil. In Edinburgh, Poole or Wilhelmshaven, there is no longer any sign of the enemy. Their graves, now long gone, had once been a prompt for British-German reconciliation and a reminder of shared losses, even of crimes committed. Without the enemy in the way, the British and Germans have been free to concentrate on constructing national, rather than shared, narratives of the two world wars. H

General Maximilian von Herff is among those whose remains lie at Cannock Chase. As head of the SS Personnel Main Office from 1942–45, he worked closely with Heinrich Himmler

Tim Grady is professor of modern European history at the University of Chester and author of *Burying the Enemy: The Story of Those Who Cared for the Dead in Two World Wars* (Yale University Press)

ALAMY

Gloucester History Festival

25th-27th April 2025

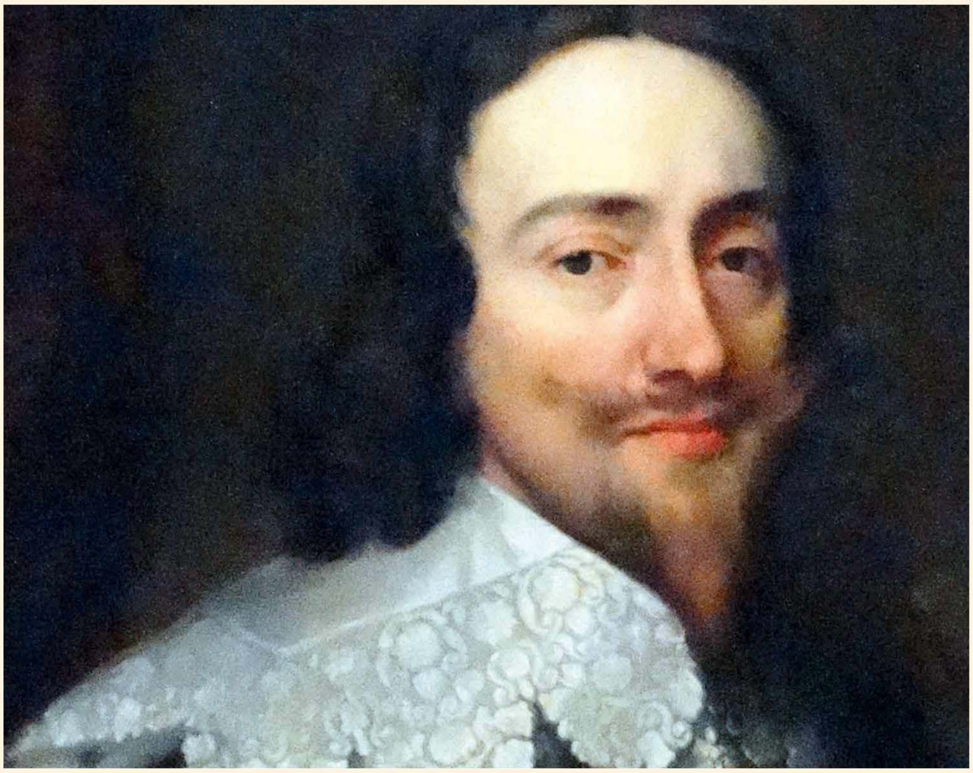
Spring Weekend

Join some of Britain's best-loved historians and broadcasters this Spring at Gloucester History Festival.

Michael Heseltine ✿ Hallie Rubenhold ✿ Janina Ramirez
Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen ✿ Ian Mortimer ✿ Bendor Grosvenor
David Omand ✿ Luke Pepera ✿ Lucy Hughes-Hallett

All events livestreamed

gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk



Imperious gaze A portrait of Charles I, painted in the 17th century. The Stuart monarch had little respect for his subjects, wrote that parliaments "ever grow cursed with age", and tried to crush dissent

Was Charles I truly a tyrant?

The reviled king was condemned to death as a "Tyrant, Traitor, Murderer and Public Enemy". But on the 400th anniversary of his accession, how fair does that judgment seem today?

BY **JONATHAN HEALEY**

GETTY IMAGES

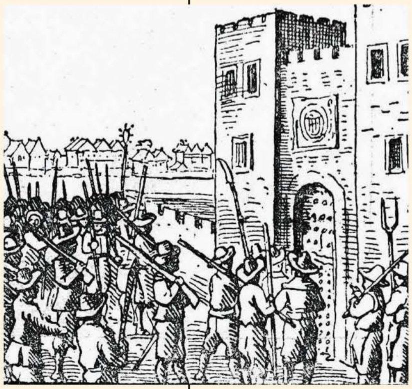
On 9 July 1637, King Charles I chaired a meeting of his Privy Council at Greenwich Palace. Among the business was the case of two draymen, William Willis and John Collins, who had been involved in a road-traffic collision. They had allowed their cart to crash into that of the Earl of Exeter, a member of the powerful Cecil family. A local jury had cleared Willis and Collins of any wrongdoing, but the king was not happy with that outcome. Charles and his council overturned the verdict, ordering that the two men be "whipped publicly through the town" as a fearsome example to others. After this, the draymen would be sent to prison, and there kept at work until further notice.

Charles I was a man who liked order. He organised his political thought around certain maxims, one of them being: "It is better the subject suffer a little than all lie out of order." Willis and Collins certainly suffered: they were flogged and locked up. After all, one couldn't have lowly draymen crashing into nobles' coaches and then being acquitted: it was indecorous and subversive.

Charles was a fussy man. His government regulated everything from the lengths of taxi journeys to the wearing of fake jewellery. He once even tried to ban swearing. Bookish, thoughtful and sensitive, Charles was possessed of a heightened sense of his own honour and dignity. By the time he ascended the throne in 1625, he was also politically active, well read and fully capable of forming his own opinions – a bit too much so, perhaps, for a king.

When Charles came to power in 1625, it was a highly unusual event. He was the first adult to ascend the Scottish throne since 1390, and only the second adult male to take the English throne since Henry VIII in 1509.

He left his thrones in a strange way, too. In 1649, he was put on trial for treason against his own people, and executed publicly. His statue in London's Royal Exchange was defaced with the Latin words *Exit Tyrannus, Regum Ultimus* – 'Exit the Tyrant, the Last of the Kings'. The trial itself had been justified on the grounds that it was legal – indeed required – for the representatives of the people to resist a tyrannical king. To its instigators, this was a moment of emergency: the killing of a king was a necessity, albeit a cruel one.



Apprentices attack Lambeth Palace in 1640. Charles had one of the perpetrators tortured, and another hanged, drawn and quartered

Charles certainly had a case to answer. After his defeat in 1646 at the end of the first phase of the Civil War, he only negotiated in bad faith – and when the opportunity to start a fresh conflict presented itself in 1648, he took it. His actions sparked renewed violence and bloodshed, and led to many innocent deaths. It was this that allowed the more radical of his enemies to push for his trial, based on a well-established philosophical position, *salus populi suprema lex*: the safety of the people is the supreme law. Charles claimed that his trial was illegal, and many have agreed with that assessment – yet it's far from black and white.

Was Charles truly a tyrant? From a modern perspective – in an age that has given us men such as Hitler and Stalin – surely swotty, art-loving Charles hardly registers. True, he had a cruel streak. After a riot in Lambeth in 1640, he had one young lad tortured – making out the order for that punishment in his own hand – and another hanged, drawn and quartered. Twice in the winter of 1641–42, he gave the order for soldiers to shoot protesters in the streets if they refused to go home. But he was probably no nastier than other leaders among his contemporaries – including even his son, Charles II, under whom great cruelties were committed in Scotland, and during whose reign many hundreds of English Dissenters died in horrific prisons.

Charles I was authoritarian. He liked to be obeyed, and sometimes took it personally when he wasn't. One infamous scandal involved a fairly unlikeable man called William Prynne, who wrote a book perceived to be insulting to the queen. In 1634, Prynne was sentenced to be imprisoned, and to have his ears cut off. Come 1637, when the same man again got into trouble, it transpired that his ears had been only partially sliced the first time around. Furious, Charles personally directed the Privy Council to find out who had been at fault for that half-done job.

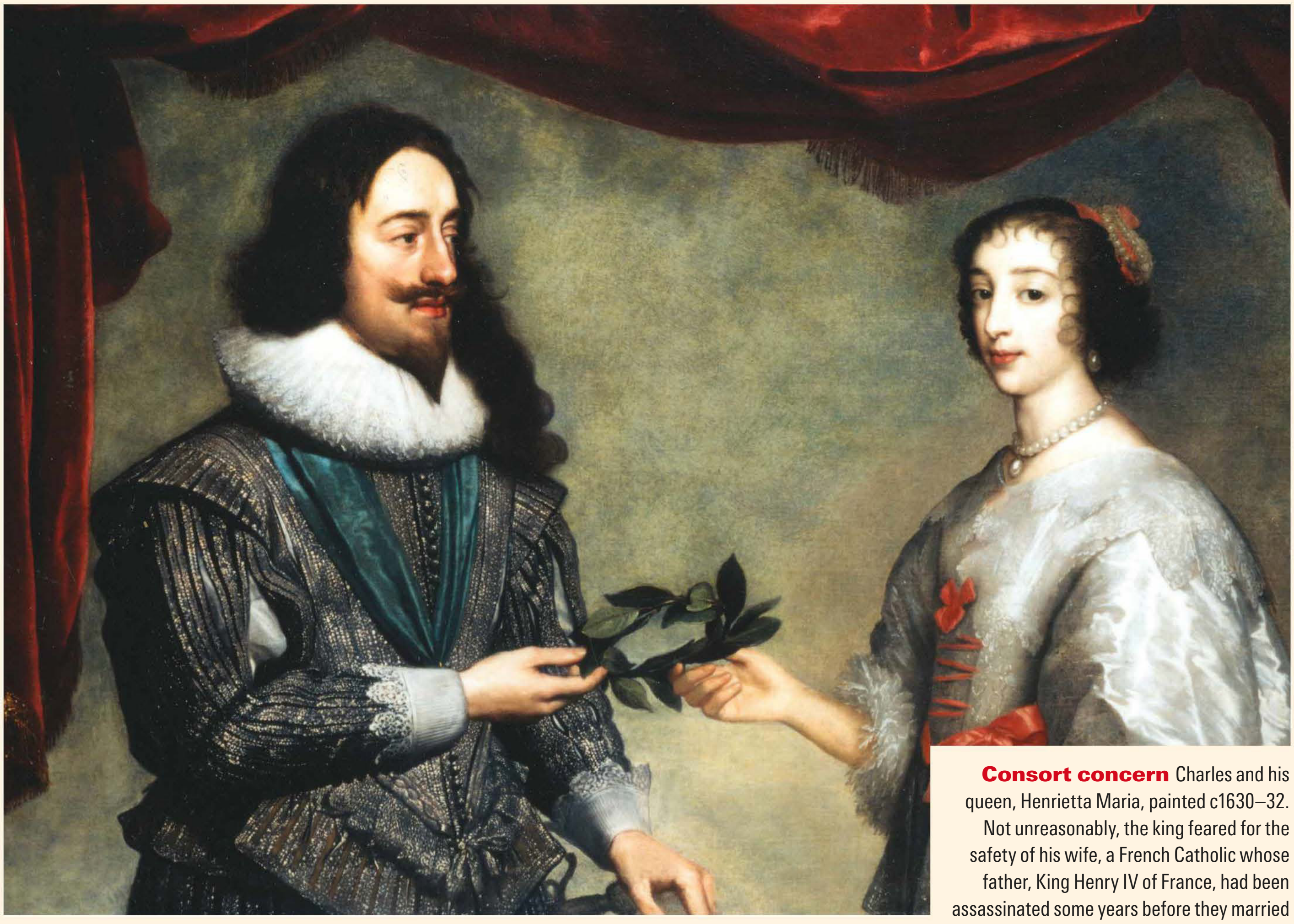
Charles also believed in personal sacrifice for the greater good: he applied this principle to himself, but inevitably it was his people who usually had to bear the brunt.

England was then a place riven by discord. The government was short of money – ironic, given the great wealth of the country at large – and, thanks to rising literacy and a thirst for news, growing numbers of people in England were keen to discuss politics and religion. London was expanding, too, bringing more people close to the geographic centres of politics at Whitehall and Westminster.

Throughout Charles's life, he carried with him a grave distrust of his subjects and their desire to involve themselves in politics. During his childhood, one of his tutors had written that the people were a "many-headed monster, which hath neither head for brains, nor brains for government". It was a sentiment Charles remembered.

TOPFOTO

Why did Charles I have to die?
Read Leanda de Lisle's article discussing the king's execution on our website: *historyextra.com/charles-i-execution*



Consort concern Charles and his queen, Henrietta Maria, painted c1630–32. Not unreasonably, the king feared for the safety of his wife, a French Catholic whose father, King Henry IV of France, had been assassinated some years before they married

TOPFOTO

He never shied from controversy, either, and it was when dealing with controversial topics that his authoritarian side dominated. In religion, Charles favoured a new, ornate and ritualised form of worship. He disliked those who disagreed, especially the so-called 'Puritans' who preferred church practice to be much plainer. Charles believed that their form of worship – which emphasised reading, careful listening and participation – was populist and anarchic. His government used the bishops to harass dissident clergymen and writers.

Another of Charles's most persistent problems was money. He knew that the English state was "pressed beyond her strength" and, in the 1620s, desperately needed to increase military spending. A furious war was raging on the continent, and Charles found himself fighting both Spain and France.

Many argued that there was only one legitimate way of raising tax: ask parliament. The English parliament, though, was reluctant to provide the necessary finance without first airing "grievances". So in 1626, Charles started to contemplate ruling without them. He levied a 'Forced Loan' – in effect, a direct tax that didn't require parliamentary sanction. He argued that this was an emergency and that, in such cases, it fell to the king to levy funds – even if he hadn't first obtained permission from the people. Worse, in order to ensure that the Forced Loan was collected, Charles imprisoned those who didn't pay.

It was here that a key technique he used to rule came to the fore. Charles allowed the issue to come to the law courts – but made sure that he won. In 1627, five imprisoned knights had sued for *habeas corpus* – demanding that they be allowed to challenge before a court the justification for what they claimed to be their unlawful detention. Before the case was heard, though, Charles personally interviewed the 12 judges to make sure that they were on his side. Unsurprisingly, they ruled

> **"Charles was authoritarian. He liked to be obeyed, and sometimes took it personally when he wasn't**

> **“Charles was furious, and vowed to rule without parliament for as long as he could. Dissident MPs were imprisoned**

in his favour – that he could imprison people without demonstrating a cause.

A showdown followed. Parliament pushed for a ‘Petition of Right’ stating certain key freedoms. Taxation without parliamentary grant was declared illegal, as was imprisonment without cause being shown. Charles reluctantly allowed the petition – but then prorogued parliament and recalled all print copies of the petition, ordering that they “be made waste paper”. It was then reissued but qualified with a series of his objections.

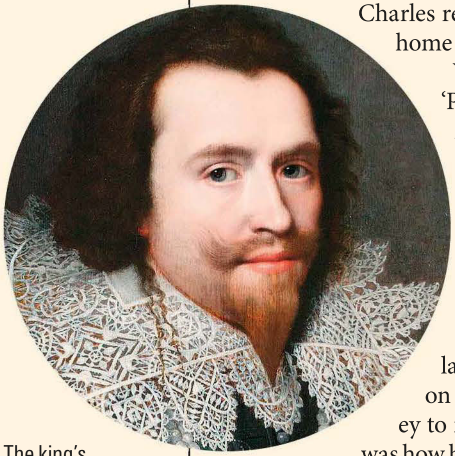
In the summer of 1628, Charles’s fears about his people were dramatically confirmed. His unpopular favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, was stabbed to death in Portsmouth. Buckingham’s killing was widely celebrated – indeed, his funeral was held at night to prevent the attendance of jeering crowds. And Charles had other reasons for fearing his subjects. Within months of ascending the throne, he had married the young and vivacious French princess Henrietta Maria. The queen’s father, Henry IV of France, had been assassinated years earlier; in addition, she was a Catholic – and anti-Catholic sentiment was rife. No wonder she and her husband worried for her safety.

More discord followed in 1629. When parliament returned that January, MPs started arguing again about tax and religion. Exasperated, Charles decided to send away the quarrelling politicians – but when his order arrived, a small group of MPs restrained the Speaker in his chair and passed a series of inflammatory motions. Charles was furious, and vowed to rule without parliament for as long as he could. Dissident MPs were imprisoned; after their leader, Sir John Eliot, died in the Tower of London, Charles refused to let his wife bury him at home in Cornwall.

What followed was a period of ‘Personal Rule’ sometimes seen as a manifestation of Charles’s alleged tyranny. Clearly, he wanted to rule without parliament; he believed that parliaments were “of the nature of cats, that ever grow cursed with age”.

But was royal rule so bad? The country was at peace, and some later looked back on these as halcyon days. Charles raised enough money to run a functioning government. It was how he did so that became the problem, and one issue in particular sparked controversy.

There is no doubt that the navy needed serious investment. The obligation to pay for ships had traditionally fallen on the coastal counties and towns; now Charles – not unreasonably – extended this inland. By doing so, though, he was effectively creating a new tax – without parliament.



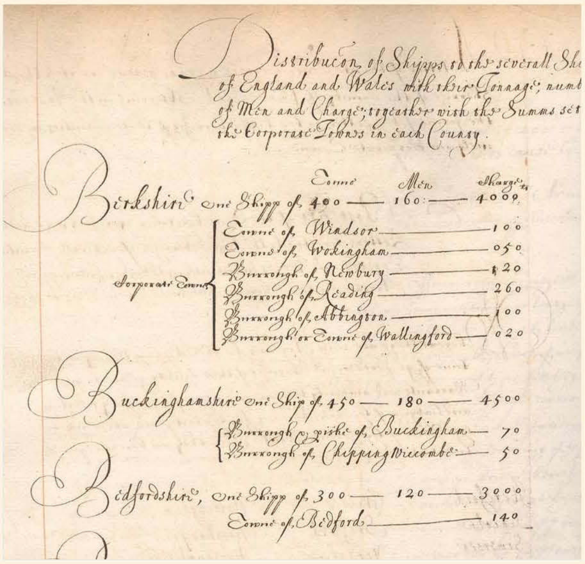
The king’s favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, whose 1628 assassination increased Charles’s fear of his people

Once more, Charles turned to his judges. He would allow Ship Money to be tested in the courts, and he would win. The king’s lawyers argued that this was an emergency situation, so it was the monarch’s duty to raise money for necessary defence. This he could do without parliament because, his attorneys argued, as “the King of England... He is an absolute Monarch”. The judges – men who had been picked by the crown – agreed, though remarkably by only the tightest of margins.

Ship Money seems obscure today, but at the time people worried that it gave the king an unlimited right to seize property simply by declaring an ‘emergency’. Whether or not Charles was a tyrant, he was building an absolutist monarchy. As the politician John Culpepper observed: “If the laws give the king power in any danger of the kingdom, whereof he is Judge, to impose what and when he please, we owe all that is left to the goodness of the king, not to the law.”

We cannot, of course, judge Charles only on his rule in England. He was king of Scotland and Ireland, too – and in both he faced huge rebellions.

He sent one of his most capable ministers to govern Ireland in 1633. Thomas Wentworth, later Earl of Strafford, was busy and bright, but was also possessed of a dangerous ideology. He believed that “reason of state” trumped law. This was similar to Charles’s belief in suppressing private interests for the public good, but it was sharper in focus and backed by a fearsome personal energy. In Ireland, Wentworth successfully played off factions against each other, and built up a military to enforce his will. His aim was to make Charles – in Ireland, at least – “as absolute a monarch as

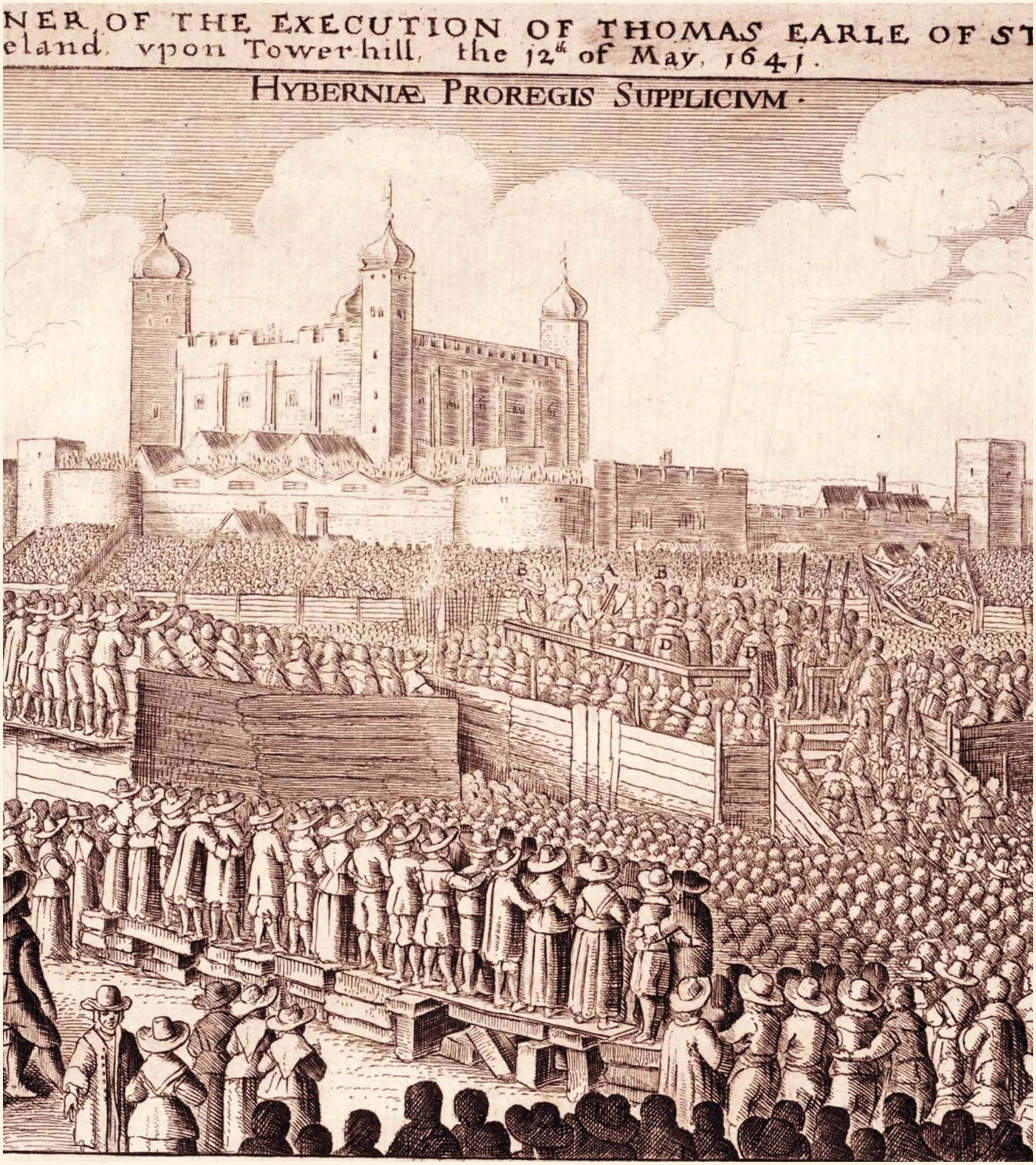


Distribucon of Shipps to the severall Shi
of England and Wales with their Tonnage, numb
of Men and Charge; togeather with the Summs set
the Corporate Townes in each County.

	Tonne	Men	Charge
Berkshire One Shipp of	400	160	4000
Corporate Townes: Towne of Windsor			100
Towne of Wokingham			050
Burrough of Newbury			120
Burrough of Reading			260
Burrough of Abbington			100
Burrough or Towne of Wallingford			020
Buckinghamshire One Ship of	450	180	4500
Burrough & parishe of Buckingham			70
Burrough of Chipping Wiccombe			50
Bedfordshire, One Shipp of	300	120	3000
Towne of Bedford			140

Stealth tax A table of Ship Money assessments from the Privy Council Register of 1636. By extending the levy to inland counties, Charles effectively created a new tax without parliament’s approval

TOPFOTO/NATIONAL ARCHIVES


NER OF THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS EARLE OF ST
eland vpon Tower-hill, the 12th of May, 1641.
HYBERNIÆ PROREGIS SUPPLICIVM
B
A
B
D
D
D

GETTY IMAGES

Fallen friend A contemporary illustration depicts Thomas Wentworth's execution on 12 May 1641. He was one of Charles's "most capable ministers", but his style of rule generated huge resentment

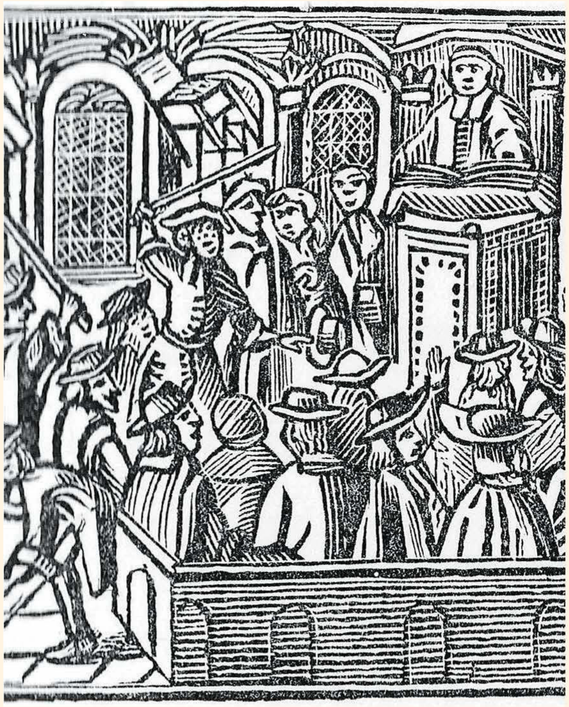
Christendom can set forth". This generated huge resentment, which in 1641 exploded into a massive uprising against English and Scottish settlers.

By that point, Charles's rule had already started crumbling elsewhere. Desperate to bring his kingdoms into some sort of religious unity, he had tried to impose English church practice in Scotland. This was met with fierce resistance, beginning in July 1637 with a riot in St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh. And when Charles failed to put down the Scottish rebellion, he was forced to turn once more to his English parliament for money.

By now, the three kingdoms were cascading into Civil War. Thomas Wentworth – dubbed 'Black Tom Tyrant' – was put on trial and beheaded. Charles changed his approach to religion, and cultivated some he had once thought of as puritans, in the hope of winning the political game of chess. "I have somewhat altered from my former thoughts," he noted slyly, "to satisfy the times."

He disavowed Ship Money, and agreed to call parliament at least once every three years. By the end of 1641, parliament was trying to remove his power to appoint his own government ministers; in 1642, they tried to strip him of his military authority, too.

Much of the blame for the problems that beset his kingdoms has been laid at Charles's feet – and with good reason. He could be difficult to trust. From 1637, he tried to use his military power to threaten those who opposed his policies. He twice raised an army against Scotland rather than engage in serious negotiations. In November 1640 and in May 1641, he plotted to use the guns and garrison at the Tower of London to overawe London and parliament. In autumn 1641, he facilitated a violent plot in Edinburgh against the Scottish leaders, including his kinsman the Marquess of Hamilton. Late in 1641, he gathered 'Cavaliers' at Whitehall Palace, ostensibly to protect his family but also to threaten parliament. Then, in the early days of 1642, he took several hundred of these men to Westminster with the aim of arresting five dissident MPs.



Clash of religion A woodcut shows the riot that erupted in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh in July 1637 following Charles's attempts to impose English church practice in Scotland

> **"From 1637, Charles repeatedly tried to use his military power to threaten those who opposed his policies**

That was an error from which Charles never recovered. The astrologer William Lilly thought that "This rash action of the king's lost him his crown", as it "left scarce any possibility of reconcilement; he not being willing to trust them, nor they to trust him." As Charles's Cavaliers stood outside the Commons, some of them cocked their pistols and threatened to shoot MPs. Charles did not allow this to happen, but parliament feared a massacre.

The day after his attempted arrests of MPs, Charles travelled to London's Guildhall and issued reassurances that he wished to rule "like a king, not a tyrant". Yet many were not so sure. That winter, he fled for the countryside, "so fleeting and so friendless", as one observer put it. There had been disorderly protests even under the palace windows, and a parliamentarian polemicist at one point managed to throw into the king's coach a pamphlet that likened Charles to Rehoboam, a tyrannical biblical king. For someone who had always feared the "many-headed monster", it was terrifying that his subjects could get so close to his person.

So was Charles I a tyrant? Historians have deployed the term 'legal tyranny', referring to his making controversial policies certain that the judges – who depended on the king for promotion – would support him in the courts. Small wonder that disgruntled subjects turned to parliament as a higher authority.

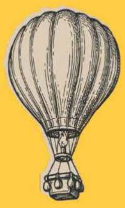
By 1642, though, Charles's enemies had gone much further. They believed that parliament needed to control the government as well as the law: to wield the power to appoint ministers and control the militia. Their partisans had even started arguing that 'reason of state' allowed them to act beyond what was ordinarily legal. No longer could parliamentarians claim to be upholding the law; now they had to say they were protecting the people. It was a revolutionary idea – and there was no way that Charles would concede it without a fight. ■

Jonathan Healey is associate professor in social history at Kellogg College, Oxford. His latest book is *The Blazing World: A New History of Revolutionary England* (Bloomsbury, 2023)

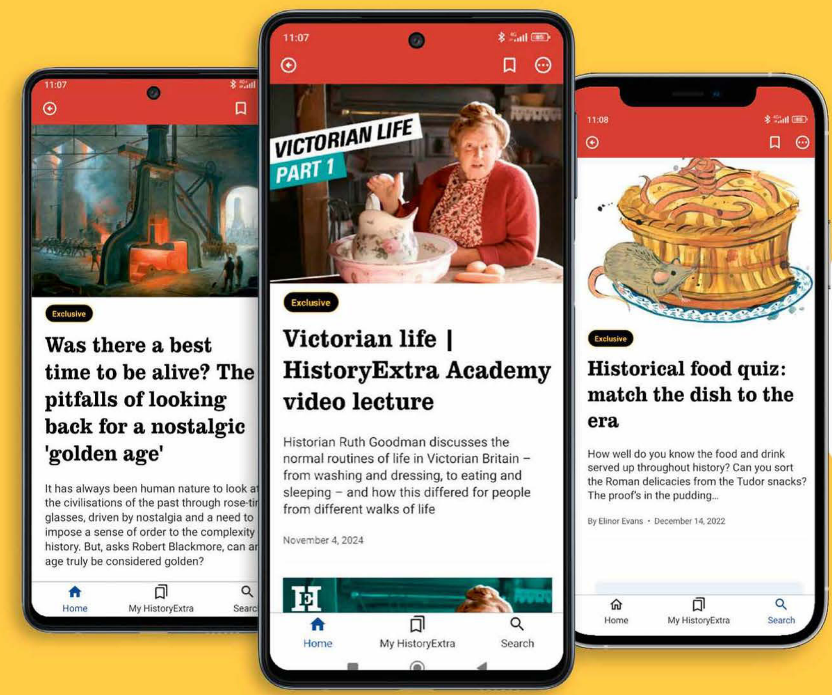
Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss Charles I's trial on BBC Radio 4's **In Our Time** at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00kpzd6*

ALAMY

HISTORY EXTRA



Unlock the past anytime, anywhere with the HistoryExtra app



11:07

Exclusive

Was there a best time to be alive? The pitfalls of looking back for a nostalgic 'golden age'

It has always been human nature to look at the civilisations of the past through rose-tin glasses, driven by nostalgia and a need to impose a sense of order to the complexity history. But, asks Robert Blackmore, can ar age truly be considered golden?

11:07

VICTORIAN LIFE PART 1

Exclusive

Victorian life | HistoryExtra Academy video lecture

Historian Ruth Goodman discusses the normal routines of life in Victorian Britain – from washing and dressing, to eating and sleeping – and how this differed for people from different walks of life

November 4, 2024

11:08

Exclusive

Historical food quiz: match the dish to the era

How well do you know the food and drink served up throughout history? Can you sort the Roman delicacies from the Tudor snacks? The proof's in the pudding...

By Elinor Evans • December 14, 2022

Unlock
FREE PREMIUM APP ACCESS*
Only 99p for 6 months*
or **FREE** as part of your magazine subscription**

Unlock our **new Academy courses** with renowned historians, including **Ruth Goodman, Laurence Rees** and **Tracy Borman**.

Dive into thousands of **expertly written articles**, **engaging podcasts** and **interactive quizzes** covering your favourite historical topics.

Create your free account, or log-in, to start exploring at historyextra.com/the-historyextra-app

DOWNLOAD NOW

GET IT ON Google play

4.7 out of 5
★★★★

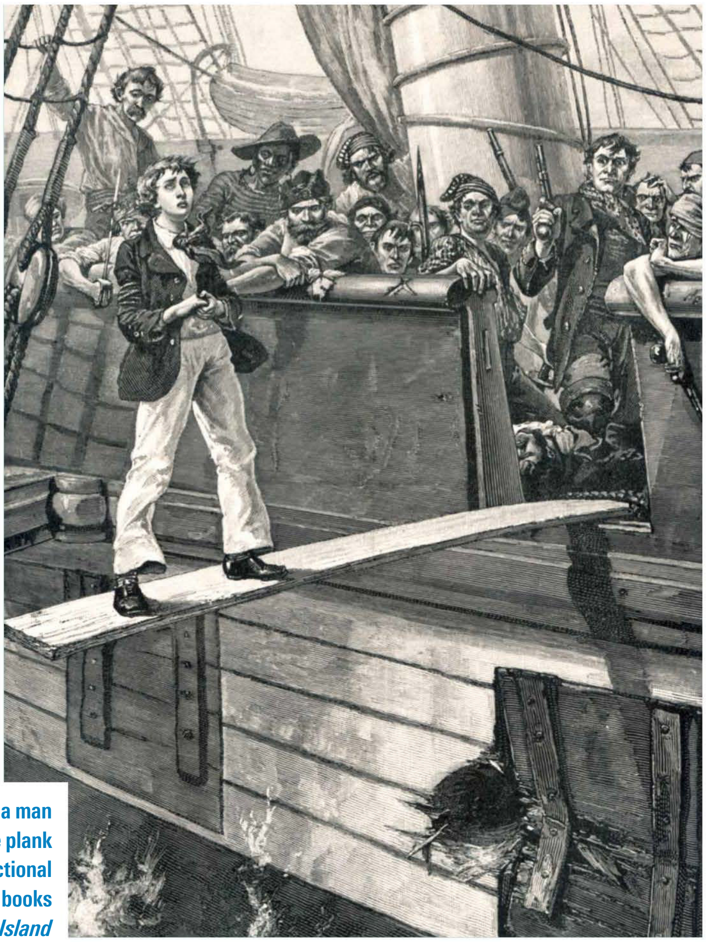
Download on the App Store

4.2 out of 5
★★★★

***Offer ends 15/05/25.** New subscribers only, T&Cs apply. Auto-renews at £/$34.99/year until cancelled.
** Your **HistoryExtra.com access** will continue to be free as part of your magazine subscription and will come to an end if you decide to cancel your print subscription at any time.

FIVE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT…
the history of pirates

Sophie Nibbs shines a light on the murky world of the bandits who marauded the high seas in the 17th and 18th centuries



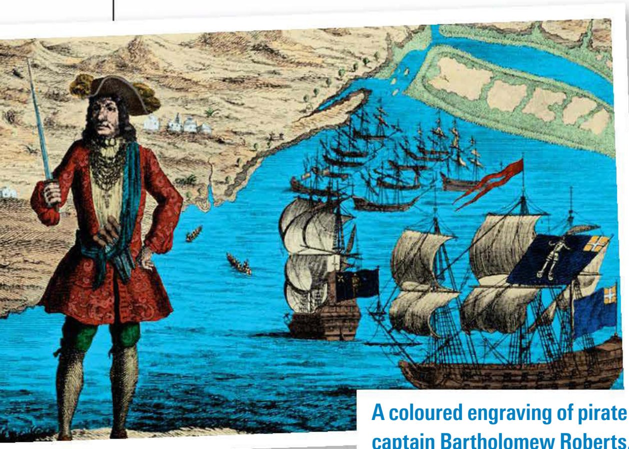
An engraving of a man made to walk the plank by pirates – a fictional fate repeated in books such as *Treasure Island*

1 Pirates followed strict rules

Despite their fearsome reputations, these maritime bandits often signed up to stringent codes of conduct. Bartholomew Roberts (1682–1722), a well-known and brutal Welsh pirate, enforced rules for his crew, aiming to ensure that things ran smoothly on board. He issued a ban on gambling, which was likely to spark conflict, and lights were to be put out at 8pm. Anyone who wanted to stay awake and continue drinking after that time was required to do so on deck.

The code also dictated that each member of the pirate crew should receive a fair share of the loot. Meanwhile, compensation was paid for injuries, encouraging a sense of loyalty and fairness. The first article of his code states that: "Every man has a vote in affairs of moment; has equal title to the fresh provisions, or strong liquors, at any time seized, and may use them at pleasure, unless a scarcity makes it necessary, for the good of all, to vote a retrenchment."

Anyone found to have violated the rules could find themselves marooned or even killed. It was often down to the rest of the crew to decide on a fitting punishment for a fellow pirate's crimes.



A coloured engraving of pirate captain Bartholomew Roberts, who enforced strict rules on his ship

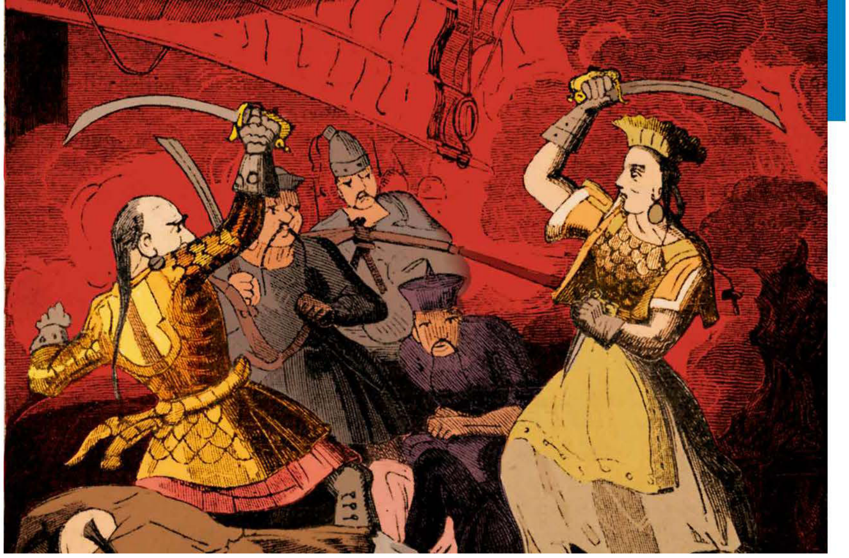
2 They didn't make captives walk the plank

Pirates dealt with their captives in various practical or brutal ways – killing them outright, enslaving them or marooning them on deserted islands. Sometimes those captured would be spared if they had useful skills or a high ransom value.

In common with many of the dramatic or fantastical ideas we hold about pirates today, the myth of enemies being made to walk the plank seems to have its roots in Captain Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates* (1724), a collection of biographies detailing the lives and dramatic tales of infamous characters. Its mysterious author – thought by some to have been Daniel Defoe but who was more likely newspaper publisher Nathaniel Mist – blended historical accounts with heavily embellished storytelling.

Such myths were picked up by other writers who helped cement them in the public consciousness. Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, wrote of the brutal – albeit mythical – practice in *Treasure Island* (1883). "His stories were what frightened people worst of all," recounts narrator Jim Hawkins of the "seaman with the sabre cut" who drank in his father's inn. "Dreadful stories they were – about hanging, and walking the plank, and storms at sea."

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



A 19th-century illustration possibly depicting Chinese pirate Zheng Yi Sao. Perhaps the most successful buccaneer of all time, at one point she commanded more than 1,800 ships

3 Women were pirates, too

There are records of several women who became highly successful pirates, defying societal norms of their time, though some codes contained articles that banned women on pirate ships.

Two of the best-known female buccaneers of the early 18th century, famed for their courage and combat skills, were Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Captain Johnson explained that, in order to be accepted onto the crew of Captain 'Calico Jack' Rackham, "they both went through the usual formalities of pirates, and dressed in men's clothes, for the more concealment of their sex". When captured in 1720, both claimed they were pregnant and were spared the death penalty. Calico Jack received no such leniency, and was hanged in Jamaica.

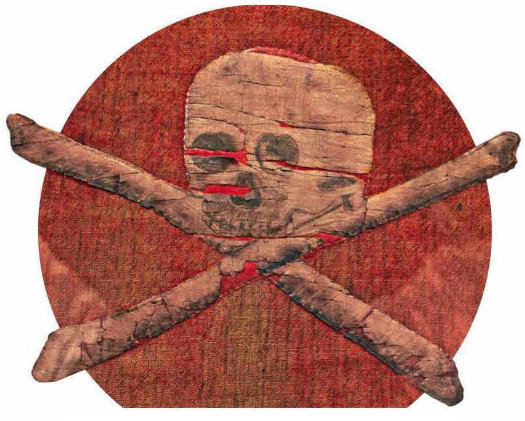
Another legendary female pirate was Zheng Yi Sao (c1775–1844), sometimes known as the 'pirate queen'. Considered one of the most successful pirates of all time, at the height of her power she commanded more than 1,800 ships in the South China Sea. In 1810, she negotiated her surrender with the Chinese government – a very rare way for a pirate's career to end. She saw out her retirement running a gambling house in Guangzhou (then Canton) until her death at the age of 69.

4 Not every pirate flag sported a skull and crossbones

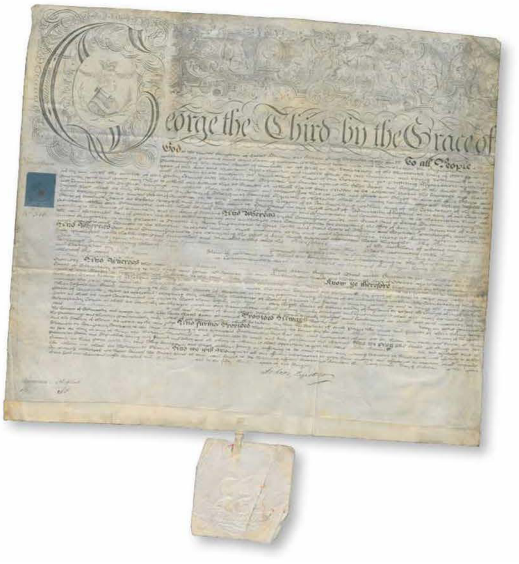
Pirate flags, sometimes known as 'Jolly Rogers', were intended to strike fear into the hearts of victims, encouraging them to surrender. While the skull and crossbones is the most iconic design, alternatives featured weapons, hourglasses and bleeding hearts – all symbols of danger and death.

If the crew raised a red flag, it indicated that blood would be shed. In a letter from 1724, Captain Richard Hawkins wrote that "[They] hoisted Jolly Roger... in the middle of which is a large skeleton with a dart in one hand, striking a bleeding heart and in the other an hour glass... when they fight under the Jolly Roger, they give quarter, which they do not when they fight under the red or bloody flag."

Another tactic was to sail under the flag of a neutral or friendly nation. Their identity masked, pirates could get close enough to attack a target ship, catching their victims off guard. They sometimes waiting until the last minute before raising the Jolly Roger.



A pirate flag bearing a skull and crossbones. The red background signalled an intention to spill blood during an attack



George the Third by the Grace of God

An 1813 letter of marque to a British privateer captain, authorising him to seize American ships. Some such men turned to piracy

5 Many pirates were former navy sailors

Several pirates served as navy or merchant sailors before being driven to piracy by poor wages, harsh conditions and a lack of opportunities after conflicts ended. Compared with legitimate posts, piracy offered better pay, freedom from oppressive hierarchies and a share of any loot. Unlike on naval vessels, pirate crews were often democratic, electing captains and dividing treasure based on skills and contributions.

Some pirates also came from captured ships. Prisoners, particularly skilled sailors, were sometimes given the option to join the pirates rather than face execution or abandonment. Adopting this recruitment strategy enabled pirate ships to build experienced and loyal crews.

There are also examples of pirates who had formerly been privateers, issued a licence or 'letter of marque' by the British government authorising them to attack and capture ships from enemy nations. Some privateers, such as Captain William Kidd, saw opportunities to make vast fortunes, and seized ships they were not permitted to take. As a result, the government in London declared Kidd a pirate; he was captured, found guilty of piracy and hanged at Execution Dock in Wapping in 1701. H

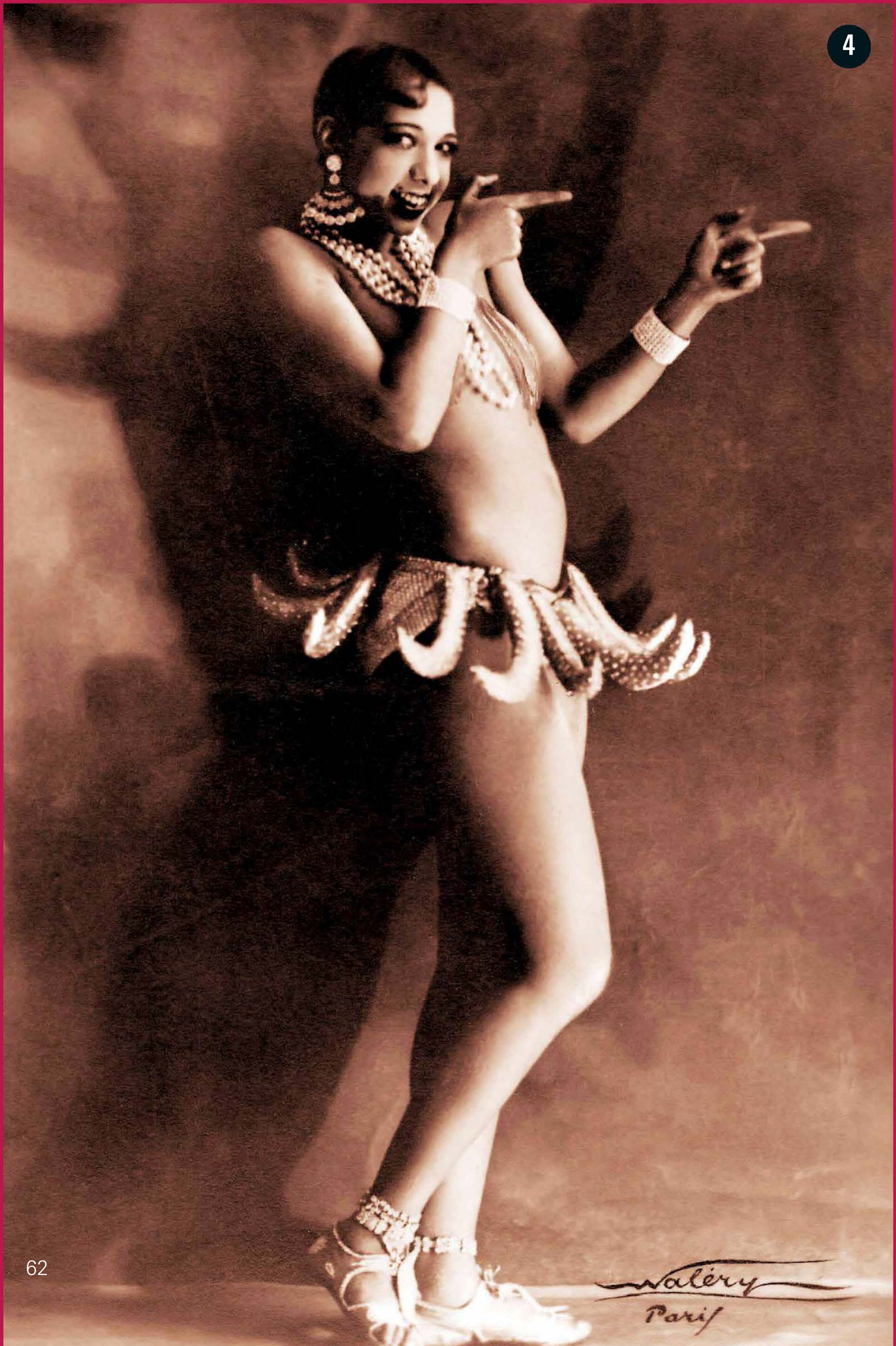
Sophie Nibbs is a curator of exhibitions and interpretation, currently at Royal Museums Greenwich

A new exhibition on the history of pirates opens at the **National Maritime Museum**, London on 29 March. *rmg.co.uk/pirates*

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/NAVAL HISTORY AND HERTIAGE COMMAND US

1

2


4

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

① Adorned with feathers for a show at Paris's Folies Bergère music hall, c1925. Baker loved living in France, where racism was less overt than in the US

② Josephine Baker reads papers at her desk in the cabaret club she opened in Paris in 1926

③ Baker joins 250,000 civil rights protesters for the March on Washington in 1963, during which she delivered a speech alongside Martin Luther King Jr

④ The famous banana skirt was introduced for Baker's performance at Paris's Folies Bergère – an act with which she soon became synonymous

⑤ Josephine Baker is inducted into the French Panthéon in Paris in November 2021 – the first black woman to be accorded this honour

⑥ Performing for troops and guests at the British Leave Club in Paris in May 1940, shortly before France was invaded by Nazi Germany

5

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Josephine Baker

DANCER, ACTIVIST, SPY

Today she's widely remembered as a risqué entertainer – yet she was also involved in many of the earth-shaking events of her era. On the 50th anniversary of Josephine Baker's death, **Anna Maria Barry** tells the story of a true 20th-century icon

She was the granddaughter of a formerly enslaved woman, and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Martin Luther King Jr on the frontline of the battle for civil rights. She was a chorus-line girl who helped redefine black artistry in the US and Europe. She danced nearly naked, but cloaked herself in mystery to spy for the Allies. She brought comedy to cabaret, but undertook the most serious and dangerous tasks for the French Resistance. She wowed Picasso, Hemingway and, ultimately, all of France.

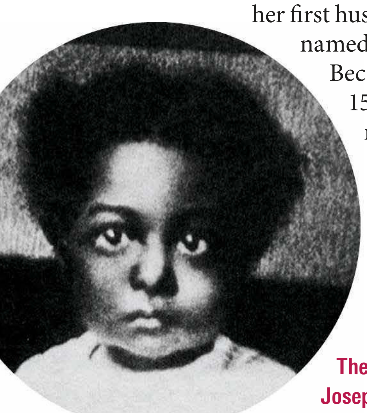
On the evening of 30 November 2021, some 46 years after her death, the streets of Paris were thronged with dignitaries and onlookers watching as jazz-age superstar Josephine Baker was inducted into the Panthéon – the mausoleum in which only the most distinguished sons and daughters of France are laid to rest – becoming the first black woman to receive this honour. How did a scandalous American dancer of the roaring twenties come to be celebrated and commemorated alongside the likes of Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Marie Curie?

Inauspicious beginnings

This remarkable story began in St Louis, Missouri in 1906, with the birth of Freda Josephine McDonald. Her mother, Carrie, seems to have been adopted by a formerly enslaved couple of African and Native American descent. Her father's identity has never been decisively confirmed.

The family was not wealthy. "We were all so very hungry and cold at home," she later recalled, explaining that she started dancing to keep warm. At eight years old she left school to work as a domestic servant for white families, who did not treat her kindly.

As a young teenager, Josephine was a fan of dance shows. She learned her craft dancing on the streets before working her way into a vaudeville troupe. At around this time, when she was just 13 years old, she married her first husband, an older man named Willie Wells. Because she was under 15, the wedding was not legal under Missouri law, though neither she nor her mother (who consented to the marriage) realised this at the time.



The infant Freda Josephine McDonald – later Josephine Baker – in St Louis, Missouri, c1908

Baker made her entrance to her first Paris show practically nude, carried onto the stage upside down and wearing only a pink flamingo feather

Perhaps marriage appealed to Josephine as a way to escape the hardships of life at home. Whatever her motives, the union was turbulent and soon imploded – reportedly following Wells' discovery that she had lied about carrying his child. While still only 15 years old, she married William Howard Baker; though she soon left him, and they later divorced, she kept his surname for the rest of her life.

In 1922 or 1923 she joined the cast of *Shuffle Along*. First staged in New York in 1921, this groundbreaking musical revue had been the first Broadway show written, produced and performed by black artists. It was a smash hit, launching the careers of luminaries including Paul Robeson. In fact, it's been credited with sparking the Harlem Renaissance – the flourishing of black American culture and politics that burgeoned in its namesake New York City neighbourhood during the 1920s and 1930s.

Baker had a relatively minor part in *Shuffle Along*, appearing at the end of a chorus line, but found a way to stand out by making her mark with comedy.

"Josephine milked her role as end girl for all it was worth," wrote biographer Ean Wood. "She tripped over her own feet, she went knock-kneed, she crossed her eyes and she grinned her goofy grin, all the time dancing rhythmically and inventively around the music. Audiences loved her. And, of course, the rest of the chorus line hated her… she was getting all of the attention."

After opening night, one critic wrote of Baker's performance: "One of the chorus girls is without question the most limber lady… Her name may be printed somewhere in the programme – if it is, I can't find it – but it should be placed outside in lights. The knees of this phenomenon are without joints… I've seen nothing funnier." Before long, everyone would know the name Josephine Baker.

In 1925, Baker arrived in Paris. She had been booked to perform in the city by Caroline Dudley Reagan, a well-connected impresario who wanted to showcase the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance for French audiences. Baker's first show in the capital was *La Revue Nègre*, staged at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, opening in October 1925. Baker made her entrance practically nude, being carried onto the stage upside down and wearing only a pink flamingo feather. She then commenced her frenzied dancing, leaping and shaking her hips – one minute contorting her body to mimic animal movements, the next letting out wild screeches as she did the Charleston and pulled comical faces to the beat of drums.

"There seemed to emanate from her violently shuddering body, her bold dislocations, her springing movements, a gushing stream of rhythm," one French critic observed. "It was she who led the spellbound drummer and the fascinated saxophonist… there was a wild splendour and magnificent animality."

Shocking and spellbinding

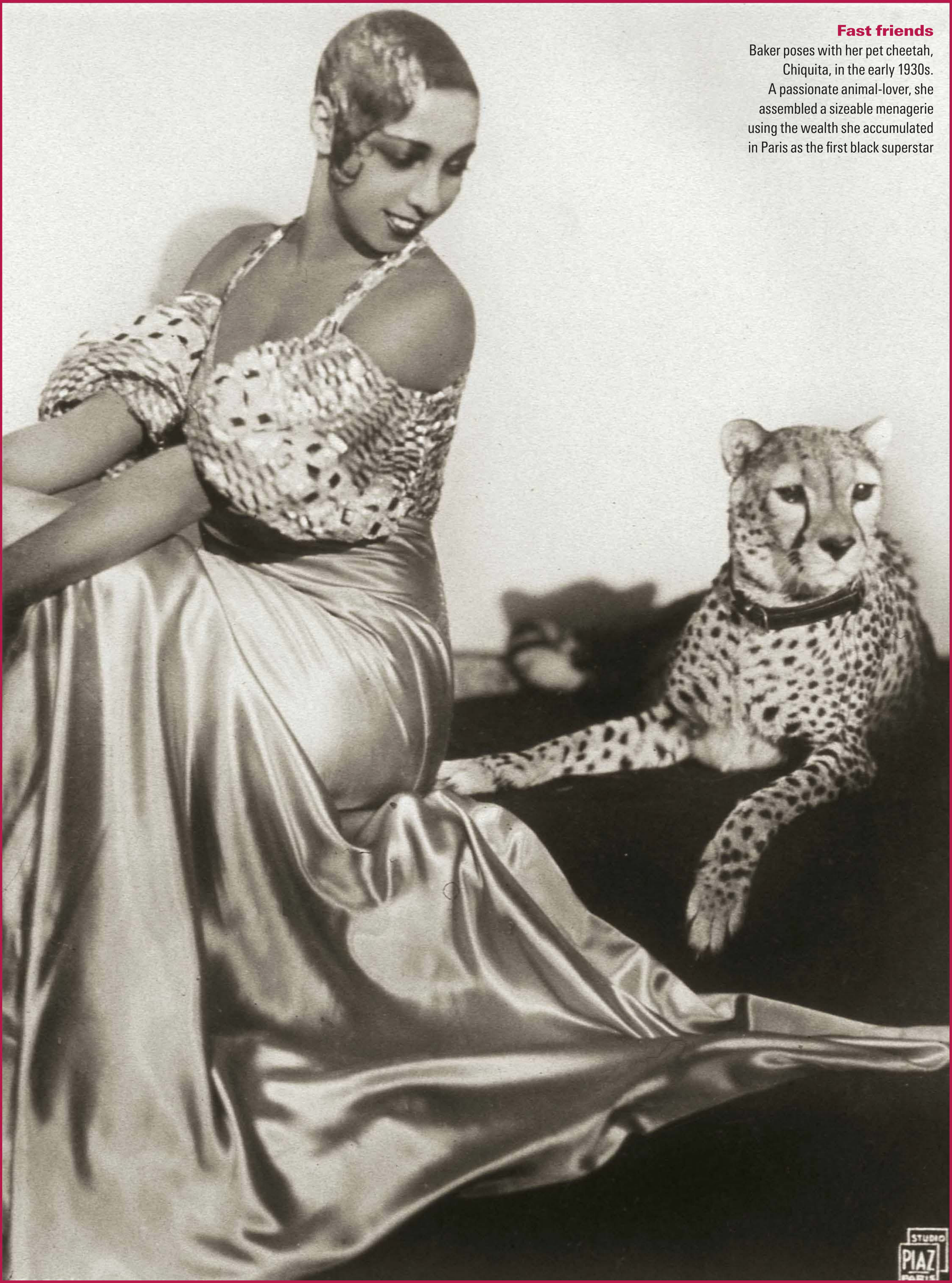
Paris had never seen anything like it, and Baker's performance sent shockwaves through the French capital. Before long, she was engaged for a residency at the famous Folies Bergère music hall, introducing the act with which she became synonymous: dancing in a skirt of bananas.

In the 1920s, a craze for black culture was sweeping Paris. The First World War had brought African and black American soldiers to the city, and with them came jazz music and dance. Meanwhile, French artists were finding inspiration in African art and sculpture. For French bohemians, these cultural forms were excitingly 'primitive', representing a simpler way of life that some found appealing in the wake of the brutal conflict. Of course, this so-called 'negrophilia' drew on reductive and racist stereotypes about African culture and people.

Josephine Baker's role within this movement remains a matter of debate. Some argue that her performances reinforced prejudiced views: she played the stereotypical 'wild savage' on stage, while allowing largely white audiences to view the black female body as a sexual object. Others, meanwhile, suggest that these were the very prejudices Baker subverted on stage, rendering such stereotypes ridiculous with her physical comedy that incorporated silly faces and exaggerated movements – all while profiting handsomely.

Whatever her understanding of such debates, this sensational act catapulted

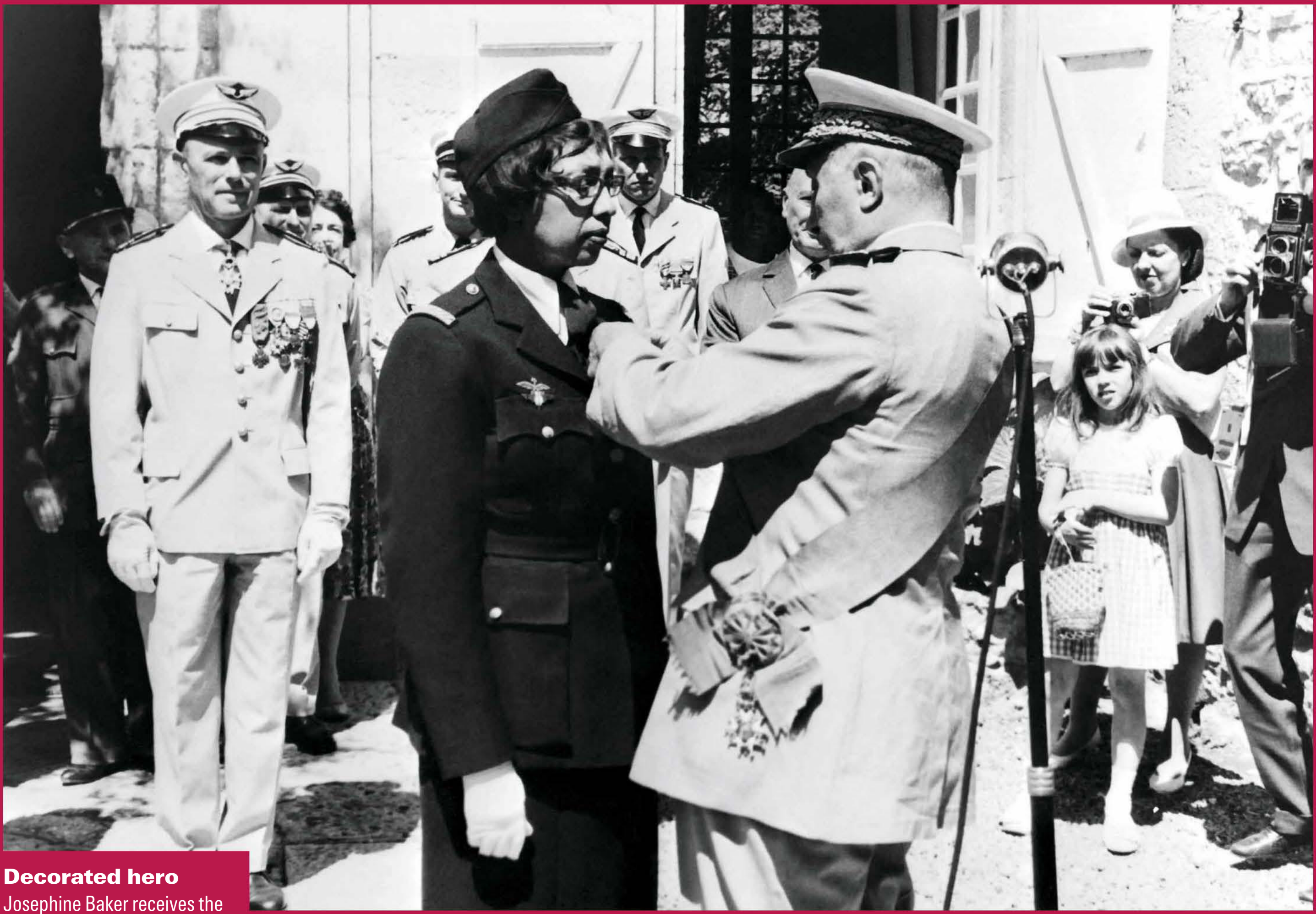
ALAMY



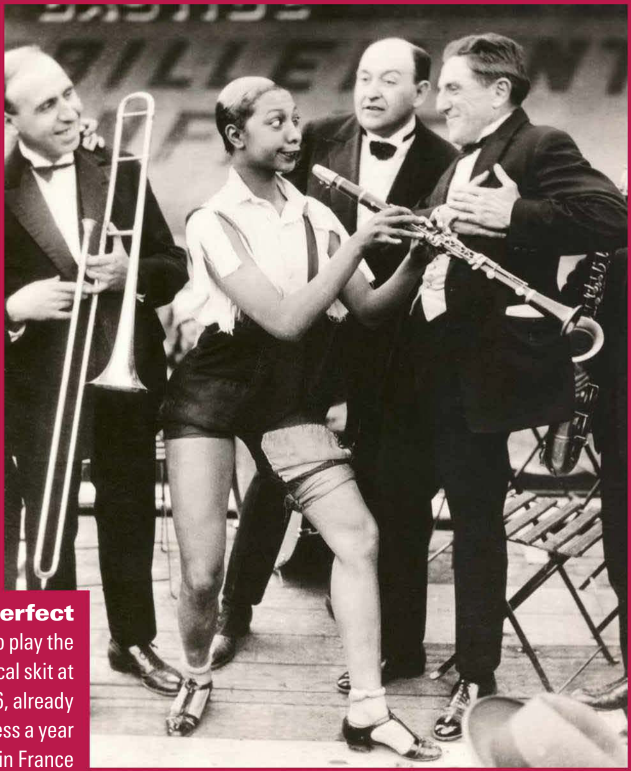
Fast friends

Baker poses with her pet cheetah, Chiquita, in the early 1930s. A passionate animal-lover, she assembled a sizeable menagerie using the wealth she accumulated in Paris as the first black superstar

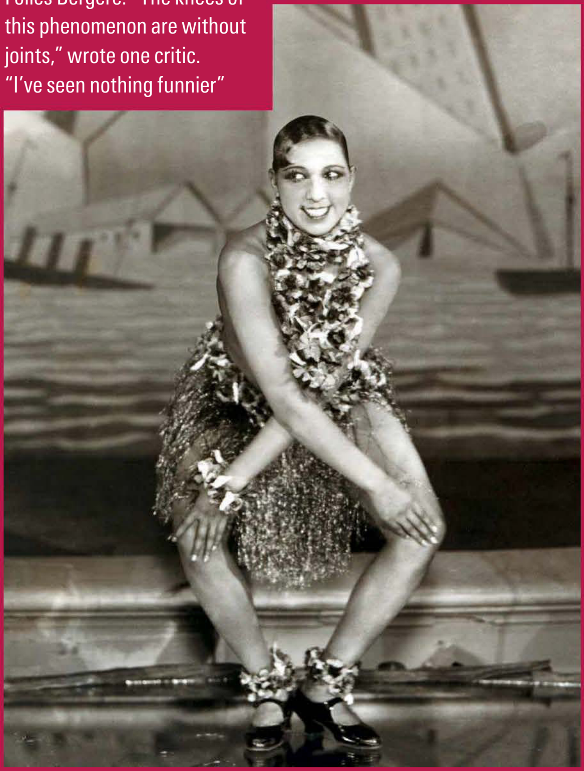
GETTY IMAGES



Decorated hero
Josephine Baker receives the Croix de Guerre and the rank of Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 1961, recognising her wartime efforts in the French Resistance



Note perfect
Baker pretends to play the clarinet during a musical skit at a Paris festival in 1926, already enjoying huge success a year after arriving in France



Playing for laughs
Dancing the Charleston at the Folies Bergère. "The knees of this phenomenon are without joints," wrote one critic. "I've seen nothing funnier"

GETTY IMAGES

Josephine Baker to wealth and fame, and earned her a place in history as the world's first black superstar. She opened her own cabaret the year after her arrival in Paris, and indulged her great passion for animals by amassing an exotic menagerie. Baker could sometimes be seen walking along the streets of the capital with her pet cheetah, Chiquita, who wore a diamond-studded collar.

Scores of French women emulated her short hairstyle, kept in place with 'Bakerfix' hair gel. Fashion designers fought to dress her and, when she went out in public, fans crowded around to request her autograph. She won many famous admirers, too. Ernest Hemingway described Baker as "the most sensational woman anyone ever saw", while an infatuated Pablo Picasso painted her – and dubbed her "the Nefertiti of now". She also took up film acting, appearing in four major movies between 1927 and 1940.

In person, Baker was warm, generous and down to earth. "Josephine, hospitable and unassuming, loves everyone she works with," recalled her friend Marcel Sauvage, a French journalist who compiled her memoir from a series of interviews. "There is not one of her colleagues, young or old, for whom she will not be a trusted, attentive friend and often a form of salvation."

Between 1928 and 1930, Baker toured in 25 countries across Europe and the Americas. Though she was often met with screaming adulation, in some places religious groups petitioned against her. "In Vienna they rang all the city's bells at full peal to warn the churchgoers that… the demon of immorality… had arrived," she recalled later.

Incorporating singing into her performances, around 1930 she recorded the patriotic song 'J'ai deux amours', which became her anthem. In this song, Baker sang of her "two loves": her country, and the city of Paris.

Baker's assimilation into that culture was complete in 1937 when she married a French industrialist and became a French citizen. Like other black Americans, she felt a sense of freedom in a country without segregation and where racism was less overt. And she soon demonstrated her love for France in a far more impactful way.

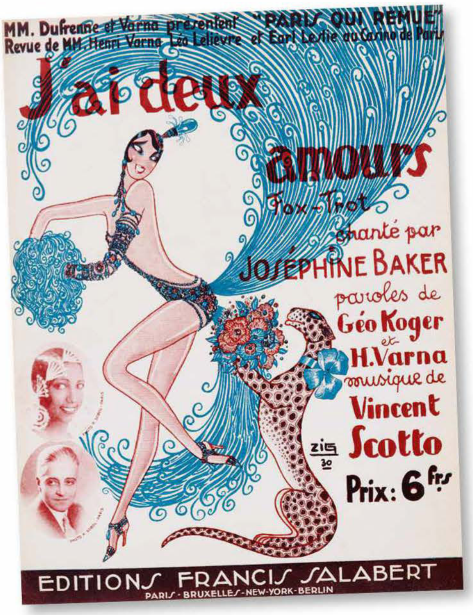
Celebrity spy

Baker was appalled by the racist politics of Nazi Germany and, after the outbreak of the Second World War, realised that she was in a unique position to help. "I only asked for one thing, the smallest thing," she said: "to serve the country to which I would always owe a debt of gratitude, even if I had to give my life."

Her celebrity status paved the way for spying. Baker had access to many influential international admirers, including ambassadors, politicians and military men. She courted them all, gathering intelligence that she passed back to the French, all while playing to perfection the role of naïve dancer – nobody guessed what she was really up to. On one of her first missions, Baker was able to leverage her friendship with Miki Sawada, the wife of the Japanese ambassador to France, to gather intelligence about Japan's intentions. She learned that Japan did not plan to maintain a coalition with the Allies, as it had during the First World War – critical information that was immediately reported back to British authorities.

She carried messages written in invisible ink, or simply pinned notes to her clothes, trusting that nobody would dare to search such a celebrity

Her war effort didn't end with espionage. Baker volunteered at a Paris feeding centre for Belgian refugees, and sent thousands of letters and packages to soldiers at the front. Before the war she had gained her pilot's licence, and she used that skill to deliver Red Cross supplies in her private plane.


MM. Dufrenne et Varna présentent "PARIS QUI REMUE"
Revue de MM. Henri Varna Léo Lelièvre et Earl Leslie au Casino de Paris
J'ai deux amours
Fox-Trot
chanté par
JOSÉPHINE BAKER
paroles de
Géo Koger
et
H.Varna
musique de
Vincent Scotto
ZIG 30
Prix: 6 Frs
EDITIONS FRANCIS SALABERT
PARIS - BRUXELLES - NEW-YORK - BERLIN

An advertising poster for the song 'J'ai deux amours', expressing Josephine Baker's adoration for her 'two loves': her country and Paris

When France fell to German forces in 1940, Baker committed herself still more deeply to the cause, and began working for the French Resistance. She turned her grand chateau in the Dordogne into a centre for Resistance activities, and secreted a forbidden radio on the property. When Germans turned up to search the chateau, she bravely convinced them to leave. She also leveraged contacts to secure safe passage out of France for several Jewish refugees.

In his 2022 book *The Flame of Resistance,* Damien Lewis details her wartime service, revealing how Baker received and passed on crucial intelligence via other members of the Resistance – including information about Luftwaffe signals and the location of German airbases. Working with Jacques Abtey, the head of French intelligence with whom she collaborated throughout the war, Baker made plans to smuggle this information into neutral Portugal, from where it could be passed to the British.

Baker and Abtey – whose relationship developed into a romantic one – operated together, transcribing the intelligence onto her music scores in invisible ink. Baker approached the Brazilian ambassador – another useful acquaintance – to organise a dance tour of Brazil that would necessitate her travelling via Portugal, providing the perfect cover story for their mission. Abtey posed as her tour secretary, and the intrepid pair were thus able to travel to Lisbon and there hand over the intelligence .

The cloak of fame

That mission, like others she completed during the war – sometimes working alone – relied on Baker's fame to serve as a cloak. On occasions she carried messages written in invisible ink and hidden in her luggage, but at other times she simply pinned notes to her clothes, trusting that nobody would dare to search such a celebrity. Her bravery was astonishing, and she was clearly prepared to risk her life for the cause.

Realising that intelligence from Spain was scant, she took it upon herself to organise a tour of that country, during which she gathered information. She even managed to cultivate a friendship with Nicolás Franco, brother of the Spanish Nationalist dictator General Francisco Franco, drawing him into conversations that she later wrote up in her hotel room, smuggling the resulting notes out of the country hidden in her underwear. Then, from 1941, she based herself in Morocco, where she continued to work for the Resistance alongside Abtey. When she fell

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Extraordinary exploits
Read more about Josephine Baker's incredible life at *historyextra.com/josephine-baker*

"Rainbow tribe" Baker relaxes with her fourth husband, composer Joseph Bouillon, at Christmas 1956 with eight of the 12 children she adopted from various countries

seriously ill there, she turned her hospital ward into an intelligence hub.

Having recovered her health, she toured military bases relentlessly, delivering performances to boost troops' morale. To do this, she travelled all over north Africa, often in dangerous circumstances. On one occasion she was forced to dive for cover as German bombers flew overhead; on another, she had to be rescued from the sea after the plane in which she was flying ditched. She refused to accept payment for this work. "I was singing for my comrades in arms," she explained. "I wasn't singing for money."

After the war ended, Baker visited Germany, where she performed for the survivors of a concentration camp. "While the poor souls there… waited to be transported out of the camp, someone needed to try and distract them, restore their hope, to console them, or at least save them first from despair," she explained. "I volunteered."

Baker's efforts during the war were recognised by French authorities, and she was later awarded the Resistance medal and the Croix de Guerre, as well as being made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur. But her fight was not yet over.

Raging against racism

Travelling to the US after the war, Baker was incensed by the racism and segregation she experienced. "Tell me, what have we achieved?" she said. "I wanted to serve in the war, as best I could, against the Germans, because of their race policy. And that policy, I found it again, more insidious, more hideous, perhaps, among the people who claimed to fight against it."

Baker was outspoken in her disgust, writing articles, joining rallies and refusing to perform for segregated audiences. She spoke at the March on Washington alongside Martin Luther King on 28 August 1963 – the day on which he delivered his famous 'I have a dream' speech. "Without unity there cannot be any victory," she told the crowd. "Continue on – you can't go wrong – the world is behind you."

After King's assassination in 1968, his widow reportedly approached Baker to become the unofficial leader of the civil rights movement – but Josephine declined, believing that her children needed her. By this point, Baker had married for a fourth time, and back in France adopted 12 children from around the world, calling this mixed family her "rainbow tribe".

When financial trouble forced her to sell her beloved chateau in 1968, she was rescued by Grace Kelly, the American actor who had married Prince Rainier of Monaco the previous decade. Princess Grace – who had much earlier witnessed Baker's outrage when staff in a New York restaurant refused to serve her because of her race – secured Baker a place to live in Monaco, where she stayed until the end of her life.

"I'd like to die breathless, exhausted, at the end of a dance or a song," Baker said, as reported in her memoir, "but not in the music hall." That wish was granted. She died on 12 April 1975 in the middle of a critically acclaimed run of shows celebrating the 50th anniversary of her Paris debut. More than 20,000 mourners attended her funeral in Paris before she was laid to rest in Monaco, where she remains today. The coffin that was carried into the Panthéon in 2021 contained not her body but soil from various places that she had called home. You might say that she was a woman of all the world – a world she strove hard to keep free and fair. H

She was forced to dive for cover as German bombers flew overhead, and was rescued from the sea after a plane in which she was flying ditched

Anna Maria Barry is a historian and writer. Josephine Baker's memoir *Fearless and Free* is now available in English, published by Vintage Classics

Hear Greg Jenner and guests discuss Josephine Baker on an episode of **You're Dead to Me** on BBC Sounds at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p086dx47*

BBC SOUNDS

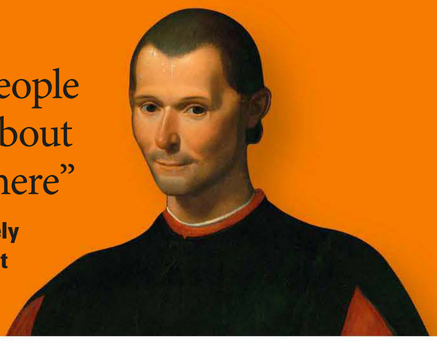
GETTY IMAGES

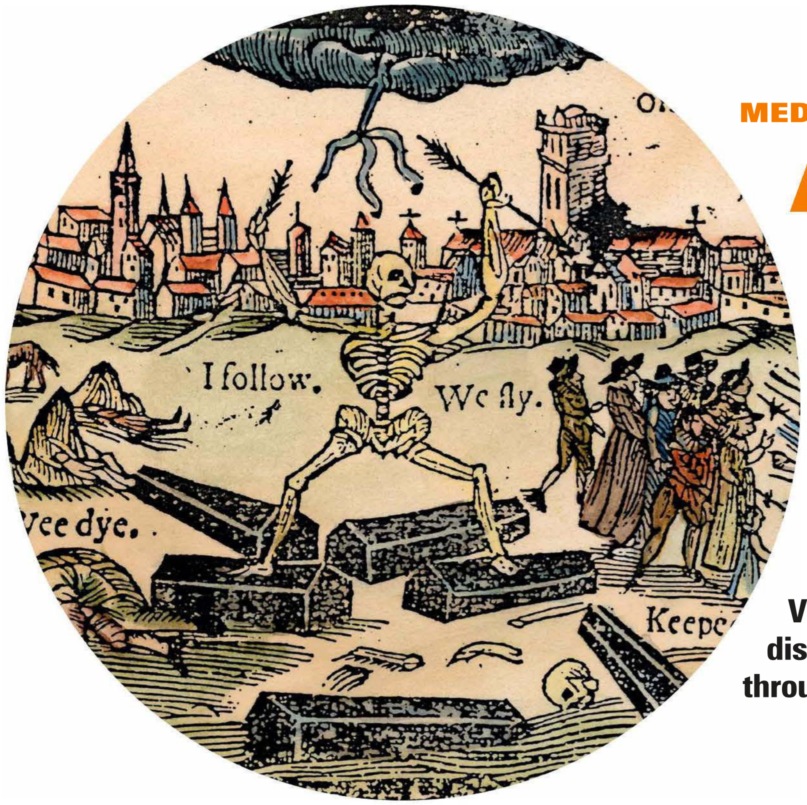
BOOKS

RENAISSANCE

"If you want to understand why people make such a fuss about Machiavelli, start here"

Catherine Fletcher enjoys a lively examination of political thought in Renaissance Italy › page 74




I follow.
We fly.
wee dye.
Keepe

MEDICINE

"Between the Black Death and Covid-19, societies learned how to coordinate and how to innovate"

Virginia Berridge is intrigued by a book discussing efforts to control contagion through the centuries › page 78

CULTURAL

"Many monarchs and local leaders demanded the kinds of reassurance that only magic could offer"

Tabitha Stanmore lauds a look at links between magic and the church › page 79

SOCIAL

"One feature of pilgrimage is that it means a multitude of different things to different people"

Peter Stanford assesses a book mapping the history of faith-based journeys › page 76

INTERVIEW

Hallie Rubenhold on the Dr Crippen murder case, and the misogyny informing earlier accounts › page 70

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO/DAVID LEVENE–GUARDIAN–EYEVINE

“We tend to take all of the prejudices of a previous era, frozen in aspic, and regurgitate them”

HALLIE RUBENHOLD speaks to Ellie Cawthorne about the notorious Crippen murder case – and why we need to expose the enduring misogyny that blackened the victim’s name

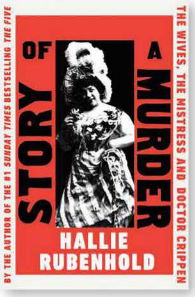
Ellie Cawthorne: In 1910, Dr Hawley Harvey Crippen murdered his wife, Belle Elmore, before going on the run with his mistress, triggering an international manhunt. It was one of the biggest news stories of the day and became known as the ‘crime of the century’. What drew you to this case as a historian?

Hallie Rubenhold: I believe that historical true crime can offer a lens through which we can look at a particular moment in time – and this case is no different. You have a huge amount of documentation – witness statements, police files, trial transcripts – revealing what people saw, what they experienced, what their daily lives were like. It’s like a core sample of what was happening in the world at a certain time, and it goes very deep. As a social historian, that’s priceless.

What can you tell us about the man at the centre of this case?

Hawley Harvey Crippen was born in Coldwater, Michigan in 1862. In 19th-century America, it was easy to leave your past behind and become somebody else – and Crippen did that a lot. He trained as a doctor and specialised in homeopathic medicine, which was seen as a legitimate, progressive field at the time. At some point, though, Crippen gave up on being a respectable doctor and decided to work in patent medicine, which was a huge industry at the turn of the 20th century. You could open any newspaper and find adverts for nostrums or cure-alls that claimed to be able to resolve anything from rheumatism to acne.

Crippen decided that this was how he would make his fortune – as a snake-oil salesman, essentially. From that point on, he fell deeper and deeper into medical fraud, which proved a slippery slope into fraud in general. Eventually he ended up in London, the white-collar fraud capital of the world at the time.


BY THE AUTHOR OF THE #1 SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING THE FIVE
STORY OF A MURDER
HALLIE RUBENHOLD
THE WIVES, THE MISTRESS AND DOCTOR CRIPPEN

Story of a Murder: The Wives, the Mistress and Doctor Crippen
by Hallie Rubenhold
(Doubleday, 512 pages, £25)

During your research, you also explored the story of Crippen’s first wife, Charlotte Bell. What happened to her?

Charlotte was a nurse, which is how she met Crippen. They married in 1887 but, less than five years later, while she was still in her early thirties, Charlotte died suddenly. It was claimed that she died of heart failure and “paralysis of the nervous system”. Her death certificate was signed by a friend of her husband, and within 72 hours Charlotte had been buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave. This all happened in the middle of winter, when the ground was frozen. Why the rush? Crippen was a proud man – why did he not bury her properly?

After Charlotte’s mysterious death, Crippen met his second wife, Belle Elmore. How did their paths cross?

Born to a poor Polish family in Brooklyn, Belle was originally called Kunegunde Mackamotzki. She went on to change her name several times during her life – to Connie, Concordia, Cora and then Belle. Names were essentially disposable at that time, and Belle got the measure of this point. It was quite an American way of looking at the world: you could be whoever you wanted, and you were what you made of yourself.

When she met Crippen, Belle was living with another man. He was actually her employer but, in spite of this, he had got her pregnant. We can’t know whether this was a consensual relationship or not, but lots of servants at the time were victims of sexual violence. New York had strict anti-abortion laws, but Crippen worked for an abortionist nonetheless – and this is how they met.

Later, Belle’s ovaries were removed on Crippen’s orders, even though nothing was wrong with her. Crippen did this because he didn’t want children, but Belle was devastated for the rest of her life.

What was Belle like as a person?

In the wake of her murder, Crippen did everything he could to blacken Belle’s character. He wanted to promote the idea that he had been pushed into murder by this terrible woman – but he must have loved her at some point.

After learning that she couldn’t have children, Belle decided to pursue a career on the stage, which was incredibly progressive for a woman in the 1890s. When the couple moved to London, she threw herself into the music-hall scene. She was part of a circle of seriously famous music-hall performers, and became involved with a fascinating group of women called the Music Hall Ladies’ Guild. This was a social organisation and charity raising money for performers who had fallen on hard times. Here, Belle really found her métier. She was outspoken, colourful and well-loved by her friends, often attending parties and having people round to her house.

Belle was an incredibly flamboyant woman, with an enormous wardrobe, and this was one of the criticisms later levelled against her. But people don’t realise that a lot of these clothes were stage outfits; performers at the time had to buy their own costumes. Yes, she liked jewellery, and Crippen bought her lots of it. But Crippen wore diamonds, too – he also enjoyed the trappings of wealth.

DAVID LEVENE –GUARDIAN –EYEVINE

PROFILE

Hallie Rubenhold is an author, historian and broadcaster. Her previous books include *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* (Doubleday, 2019)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID LEVENE

Another important character in this story is Crippen's mistress, Ethel Le Neve. Who was she?

Ethel Le Neve – or Ethel Neave, as she was born – was such a complex character. All of the people in this story are fascinating to me, but Ethel positively haunted me. Her story also offers an interesting insight into the changing landscape for women at the time. By the turn of the 20th century, women were working in shops, factories and domestic service, but Ethel went to secretarial college. Working in an office allowed working-class women like Ethel to enter the middle classes. Although they were paid much less than their male contemporaries, these women could earn (and spend) their own money. They could live apart from their parents, as Ethel did. It was an exciting, empowering time – and as a so-called 'New Woman', Ethel was right in the thick of it all.

Crippen initially hired Ethel as his secretary but, over time, she became his right-hand woman in all of his fraudulent schemes, and the pair became lovers. Their relationship lasted around six years; all the while, he was promising to marry her. He told Ethel that Belle was going to leave him for another man, but there's no proof of that. Eventually, Ethel got pregnant; she, too, had an abortion, but this was a real tipping point. She started pushing Crippen for answers about the marriage – and he decided to take matters into his own hands.

How did Crippen plan to kill his wife, Belle?

First, he bought a sedative called hyoscine hydrobromide. Crippen's plan was to make it look as if Belle died in her sleep, and then get a doctor friend to sign the death certificate. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Then, Bob's your uncle – he could marry Ethel.

But it didn't quite work out like that. Crippen gave Belle too much hyoscine hydrobromide. Though it's a sedative, at very high doses it can create the opposite effect – it makes you sick and act crazy, then stops your heart. Crippen gave Belle five grains, when one would have been sufficient. Belle probably started screaming, or there may have been a physical fight; in any case, by the time she died, there would have been evidence on her body revealing what had happened, and he couldn't pass it off as a peaceful death in her sleep. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Crippen had to get rid of a body.

How did he try to cover up the murder?

He had a real problem, because now he had to make up an excuse for his wife's disappearance. And the members of the Music Hall Ladies' Guild were beginning to ask questions. Crippen decided to tell them that Belle had gone to America at late notice to visit a dying relative. But he kept changing the story – he was constantly pivoting.

Partners in crime Dr Hawley Harvey Crippen and his mistress, Ethel Le Neve, pictured c1910 – the year in which he murdered his wife and dismembered the body

> **Crippen was an outwardly respectable man, taking the tram to work every day – while in private he had chopped up his wife's body and hidden it in the basement**

Without a shadow of a doubt, Ethel knew exactly what was going on in this cover-up. She always knew Crippen's secrets – they were partners in crime, quite literally. After Belle was gone, Ethel moved into the Crippens' house at Hilldrop Crescent in north London, and started calling herself Mrs Crippen. She also appropriated Belle's enormous wardrobe of clothing, running around town in her furs.

But what really gave her away was a distinctive diamond brooch called the Rising Sun. This brooch had belonged to Belle, and all of her friends were familiar with it. After Belle had 'gone to America', Crippen bought two tickets for a charity ball hosted by Belle's friends. He took Ethel, his secretary, who was dressed in Belle's clothes and wearing this Rising Sun brooch. The first time I read this, I couldn't believe it. All of the people at the ball were performers with quite rackety lives, so the idea of someone having a mistress wasn't that shocking. What *was* brazen was that these were Belle's friends. It was rude, and it was obnoxious, like sticking two fingers up at everybody. Of course, it transpired that Belle hadn't gone to America; in fact, she'd never left the house.

The terrible way in which Crippen disposed of his wife's body would really come back to haunt him in court. Remember, this was a man who understood anatomy. He removed all of Belle's bones, as well as her head and sex organs, and disposed of them piecemeal. We don't know where these ended up, but Hilldrop Crescent was close to a polluted canal and an abattoir. He then put the remaining viscera under the floor of his coal cellar, covered it with quicklime and assumed it would disintegrate.

Ethel was always complaining that Belle and Crippen hadn't kept a servant, and moaning about how much cleaning there was to do. But curiously, although she moved into Hilldrop Crescent in March, they didn't recruit a servant until June. Mysteriously, lots of things were being burned, and huge amounts of rubbish were removed. The local dustmen later said that they'd never seen anything like it, and visitors reported that the house had a strange smell. So Ethel must have known what was in the basement.

Was the shocking treatment of Belle's body the reason why this domestic murder became known as the 'crime of the century'?

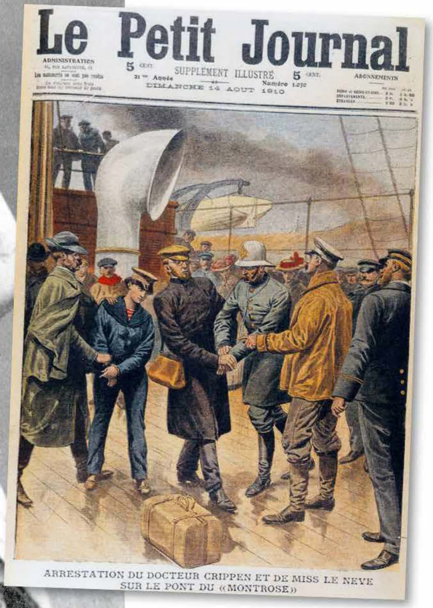
That was part of it. But this also happened in middle-class suburbia, where everybody was worrying about their sherry glasses and Christmas cards. The idea that Crippen was an outwardly respectable man, taking the tram to work every day in his bowler hat, while in private he had chopped up his wife's body and hidden it in the basement of his tree-lined street, was grotesque and horrifying. The middle classes were shocked, because the Crippens could be their neighbours. No one was safe.

How did Crippen's crimes get uncovered?

This is where the story takes a real turn. After being dismissed by the police several times, Belle's friends at the Music Hall Ladies' Guild

GETTY IMAGES

Crime of the century Hear more of this interview with Hallie Rubenhold on our podcast: *historyextra.com/story-murder-pod*



Le Petit Journal

ADMINISTRATION

5 CENT. SUPPLÉMENT ILLUSTRÉ 5 CENT.

21me Année

Numéro 1.030

DIMANCHE 14 AOUT 1910

ABONNEMENTS

ARRESTATION DU DOCTEUR CRIPPEN ET DE MISS LE NEVE SUR LE PONT DU «MONTROSE»

Misjudged and murdered

LEFT: Belle Elmore, Crippen's second wife, who harboured ambitions of fame as a music-hall performer and was posthumously criticised for her lavish wardrobe ABOVE: Crippen and Ethel Le Neve, disguised as a boy, are apprehended aboard the *Montrose*

finally convinced Scotland Yard to investigate. Inspector Walter Dew was assigned to the case and interviewed Crippen, which basically spooked him. So Crippen and Ethel decided to go on the run, disguised as father and son. He shaved off his moustache, while she cut her hair and dressed in boy's clothing. They sailed to the Hook of Holland and travelled on to Antwerp and Brussels, where they hid out in a hotel for a while before boarding a ship called the *Montrose* and sailing to Quebec.

By then, Dew had discovered what was in the basement of Hilldrop Crescent. Bulletins were issued all over the world: every port was watching out for the couple, and the newspapers were going absolutely mad. The whole world was looking for them. This story was unfolding in real time, like some kind of reality drama. People became completely wrapped up in it.

Meanwhile, aboard the *Montrose*, Crippen and Ethel had caught the attention of the captain. He realised that something was amiss with this odd father-and-son duo, and used his Marconi wireless transmitter to contact Scotland Yard. Inspector Dew jumped on the *Laurentic* – one of the fastest ships in the world – to try to beat them to Quebec. This case really highlighted the explosive innovations in transport and communication happening at the time.

Dew did beat Crippen and Ethel to Canada – and arrested them as soon as the *Montrose* came into port. They were brought back to Liverpool, where they were met with wild crowds as they got off the ship – throngs pushing and shoving and booing and hissing. People climbed in through the skylights at Bow Street Magistrates' Court to witness the hearing. The trial was similarly sensational; even Winston Churchill went to watch.

Crippen and Ethel were tried separately. Crippen was found guilty, based on toxicology – which was fairly new at the time – and pathology reports. Meanwhile, the murder charges against Ethel were dropped, and she was instead charged as an accomplice to murder. But she played up to an image of a poor, quivering girl who had known nothing – and was acquitted. There was no attempt to gather more evidence against her.

For the rest of her life, Ethel remained completely unrepentant. She never once demonstrated remorse or expressed any sadness for Belle's family or friends. Crippen was executed, but Ethel went on to lead an ordinary life – changing her name, disappearing into the ether and dying in the 1960s. Even her children never knew her previous identity.

How has this case been misrepresented in the past, and why did you want to rectify that?

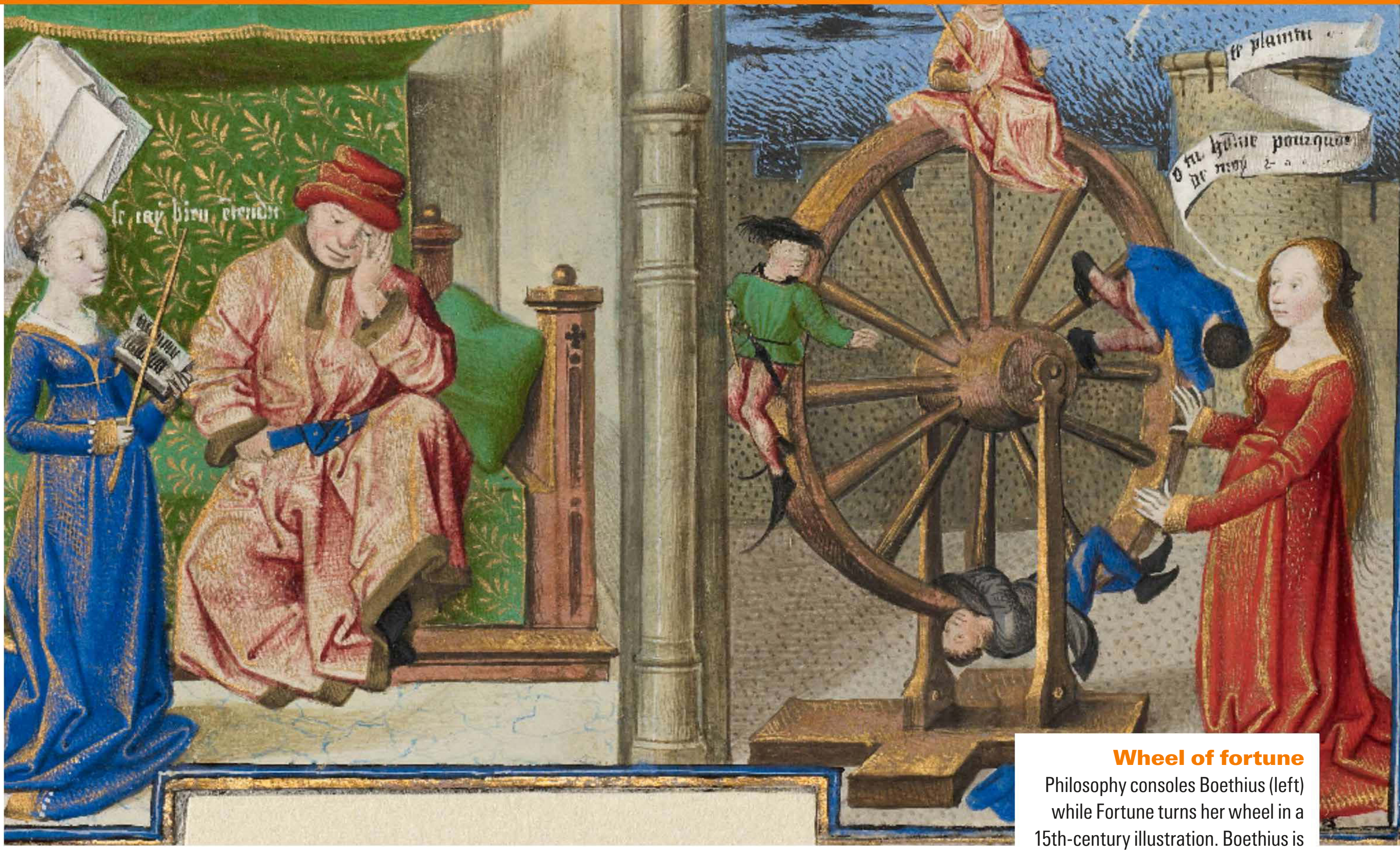
I wanted to challenge the way the women involved have been portrayed – Belle, especially, who has been maligned and even blamed for her own murder.

The first account of this case was written by Alexander Bell Filson Young in 1920. It's important to remember what was going on at the time. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act was passed in 1919, which meant that women could enter the professions. Women were bobbing their hair, wearing make-up, shortening their hemlines. Massive change was afoot, and a lot of people were perturbed. You can see this reflected in the way Filson Young writes about the trial: he demonises Belle Elmore as a horrible, shrewish woman who destroyed her husband's life. According to his narrative, Ethel was a good girl, and Crippen was a good man, because he was respectable and educated. Belle Elmore was the monster who needed to be slain in order for them to be together.

Every account that came out afterwards followed suit. Belle was a slut and a peacock, they said: she deserved to die. But this is just utter rubbish and unadulterated misogyny. There's absolutely no proof that she was that way. And even if she were, in what world is it okay to say that a woman deserved to be murdered?

More generally, we need to reconsider how we approach and discuss historical true crime, because we tend to take all of the prejudices of a previous era, frozen in aspic, and regurgitate them. But we should treat true crime as we would any other historical event – something that's worthy of dissection and proper examination. Consider this my clarion call to historians to take historical true crime seriously. H

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

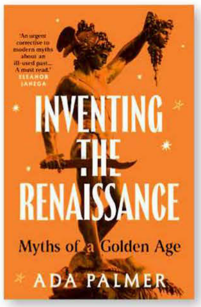


Wheel of fortune
Philosophy consoles Boethius (left) while Fortune turns her wheel in a 15th-century illustration. Boethius is among the influential figures discussed in Ada Palmer's new book

RENAISSANCE

Shock and awe in the Renaissance

CATHERINE FLETCHER is engaged by a lively look at Renaissance political thought focusing on the humanist ideas of Niccolò Machiavelli



Inventing the Renaissance: Myths of a Golden Age
by Ada Palmer
Apollo, 768 pages, £30

If you have to summarise the Great Names of the Renaissance, there's a standard list. Four are also Ninja turtles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Donatello. Then we have the Borgias, the Medici and, of course, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527).

Inventing the Renaissance is mainly concerned with the last on that list. It does deal with the Borgias and the Medici – because they're necessary to understand what Machiavelli was on about – but rather less with the artists. The focus of Palmer's book is instead Renaissance political thought, especially – but not only – humanism. Nowadays we associate humanism with atheism, but that wasn't necessarily the case in the 15th or 16th century. Machiavelli, who worked for the Republic of Florence but is best known as the author of *The Prince*, was sometimes labelled an atheist. As Palmer explains, however, that's not so much because he didn't believe in God (we actually don't know either way) but because his ideas were so shocking. His challenge to conventional philosophy quickly inspired the image of the evil Machiavel, scheming his way through the corridors of power.

Palmer's great achievement here is her accessible explanation of just why Machiavelli's thinking was so novel. The important thing was not internal morals, nor external rules, but the consequences of actions. That was a philosophical breakthrough, and makes Machiavelli's thought a precursor to utilitarianism, the branch of philosophy that says we should seek to maximise happiness. Palmer also does an excellent job of explaining what exactly Renaissance humanism was, and of bringing the two together to answer a question she was originally asked in an MA exam: Was Machiavelli a humanist?

Addressing this question requires an excursion through a variety of ancient thinkers who influenced their Renaissance successors. One is Boethius who, in the sixth century, wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, even as he faced a death sentence. Another is Saint Augustine, whose Christian thought in fact incorporated many earlier pagan ideas.

Along the way, we learn about the different historiographical approaches to this question – in other words, how scholars have approached the topic over time. One of the challenges in deciding exactly where Machiavelli fits into humanism is that there's been a long-running debate about exactly what humanism is. Palmer provides some

TOPFOTO

> **// The important thing in Machiavellian thought was not internal morals, nor external rules, but the consequences of actions //**

entertaining possible definitions. Perhaps you were a humanist if you received a letter from the Catholic reformer Erasmus, for example. Her final, more serious, answer favours the idea that humanism was characterised by Virtue Politics – a concept developed by her former PhD supervisor James Hankins in a recent book.

Nine dudes in a tower

The processes of history-writing are central to the message of Palmer's book, which – as its title suggests – is not so much about the Renaissance as a period or movement, but about its invention by subsequent historians. Hers is just one of the possible Renaissances; others are available.

In a chapter entitled *Why Did Ada Palmer Start Studying the Renaissance?* she narrates how she herself came to the topic – from thinking about Freud and the First World War, in fact. The rather quirky title of that chapter gives a sense of the wider style of the book, which is pacey, engaging and sometimes idiosyncratic. At 768 pages (in 67 chapters), it's a sprawling volume, some of it adapted from Palmer's blog. It has a blog's episodic quality, with more loose ends and tangents than are usually found in a history book. The process of historiographical debate, for example, is illustrated with a detour into the history of Greenland. We also get a "brief rant" (Palmer's description) about how she "once gave an entire conference paper on the opening sentence of Pomponio Leto's life of Lucretius, and how many ridiculous unnecessary rare grammatical forms he uses just to make it hard to understand!"

Palmer's writing is lively. The nine priors who were elected from the Florentine elite to rule the city become the "Nine Dudes in a Tower", and occasional comic dialogues interrupt the main proceedings. Humour is a very personal thing and, though some of the jokes landed nicely, on other occasions I felt Palmer was trying too hard to be down with the kids. Her discussion of Renaissance political thought has a more straightforward tone, which I preferred.

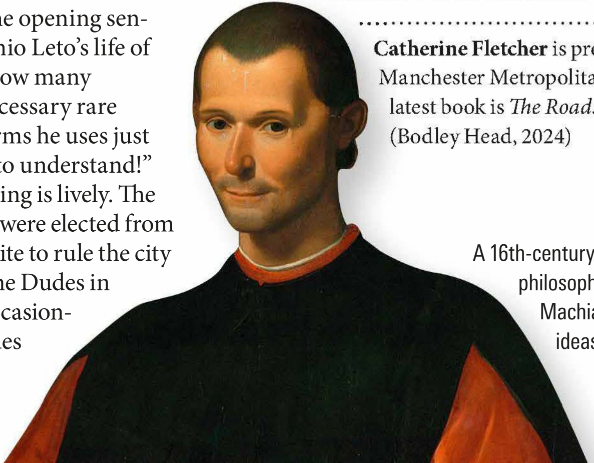
In between the opening sections, which introduce historical method, and the closing discussion of Renaissance humanism and what happened next, we get a series of pen portraits of individuals from the period. Lucrezia Borgia's life is narrated in a tour de force of second-person narrative: "You are Lucrezia Borgia." Palmer also writes fiction, and rises to the challenge of this literary approach. The only other really well-known names here are Michelangelo and Savonarola, the hellfire preacher who briefly led Florence. This famous trio are accompanied by another dozen who illustrate different aspects of (mainly elite) Renaissance life.

This Part III aims to set the scene for the discussion on humanism to come, but some of the figures are better connected to that theme than others. One of the featured individuals is an assassin, Giovanni Battista da Montesecco (a figure from the 1478 Pazzi conspiracy against the Medici), and I wondered whether we might return in the final sections to the philosophical justification for assassination, but no. On the other hand, there's rather an overlap with the Borgias when we get to Machiavelli's relationship with Lucrezia's brother Cesare, which more careful editing could have avoided.

Overall, *Inventing the Renaissance* has some great material for anyone trying to find an accessible explanation of Machiavelli and humanism. Palmer's description of her class role-playing the 1492 papal conclave (which eventually elected Rodrigo Borgia as pope) will be an inspiration to any teacher of the subject.

If you want a full overview of how Renaissance history has been written, you'll need to combine this with other books, especially on the art side. For an engaging introduction to what Renaissance humanism was, though, and why people make such a fuss about Machiavelli, do start here. H

Catherine Fletcher is professor of history at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her latest book is *The Roads to Rome: A History* (Bodley Head, 2024)



A 16th-century portrait of philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, who developed ideas of humanism

GETTY IMAGES

ON THE PODCAST

The Renaissance

Content producer **Danny Bird** picks episodes of the HistoryExtra podcast about this dynamic era

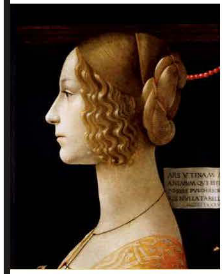
Artistic genius

Even among the many luminaries of the Renaissance, Michelangelo stands out. From his sublime sculptures to the majesty of the Sistine Chapel, this brilliant artist helped to define the style and substance of a transformative epoch. Catherine Fletcher joined us to examine the man for our *Life of the Week* series.
historyextra.com/michelangelo-pod

Shakespeare's sisters

Histories of the Renaissance often extol the lives of 'great men', but this cultural revolution was also shaped by creative women. In a 2024 episode, Ramie Targoff introduced some overlooked pioneers – from England's first female playwright, Elizabeth Cary, to Shakespeare's contemporary Mary Sidney, translator of the *Book of Psalms* into English verse.
historyextra.com/renaissance-women

Beauty regimes

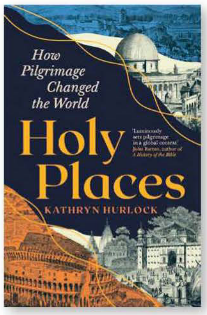


Using breadcrumbs for exfoliation and toxic lead-based cosmetics, women knew that appearances could make or break reputations during the Renaissance. In this episode, Jill Burke guides us through the era's strict beauty ideals and explains how looking good – often at the expense of health – was fundamental to wielding power and influence.
historyextra.com/renaissance-beauty

RELIGION

Trail of thought

An exploration of the history of pilgrimage is informative but rather too objective for the subject matter, says **PETER STANFORD**



Holy Places: How Pilgrimage Changed the World
by Kathryn Hurlock
Profile, 464 pages, £22

Discerning where the modern world is heading can be a confusing business, especially when one set of evidence contradicts another. In the west, organised religion is in decline in all but a few small pockets, yet pilgrimage is expanding fast. Throughout history, it has usually been intimately connected with faith traditions, a chance to join with others of similar beliefs on a physical journey to get closer to your god or gods.

So why, then, are we seeing spectacular revivals of, for example, the Camino de Santiago – the ancient Catholic pilgrim paths to the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela, by tradition the burial place of the apostle James? By the mid-1970s, notes Kathryn Hurlock, only 240 pilgrims were recorded walking to Santiago each year. In 2024, nearly 500,000 completed some or all of this pilgrimage, fewer than half of whom claimed any sort of faith allegiance.

The usual answer is that commercial tourism is gobbling up a religious ritual, but Hurlock has her doubts about that. Tourism, after all, has always been part and parcel of this penchant for pilgrimage, with whole infrastructures evolving in cities such as Rome, Jerusalem and Mecca to cater for the bodily needs of the spiritual seekers who turn up at their gates.

What is distinctive is that difference between the journey and the arrival. Walking in the footsteps of countless millions of pilgrims down the ages on time-honoured pathways cannot but have an interior effect on those who start off doing so merely as an enjoyable walking holiday.

Hope for healing Invalid pilgrims are cared for at Lourdes in south-west France, 1937. This venerated site is among those described in a new book roaming the histories of 19 pilgrimage destinations worldwide

TOPFOTO

Holy Places is a collection of pen portraits of 19 places of pilgrimage. The destinations include Tai Shan mountain in China; Lourdes in France; Delphi in Greece; the circuit of temples on Shikoku, Japan; Karbala in Iraq; and the less-familiar Rātana Pā in New Zealand, revered by Māori people. It is unclear how many of these Hurlock has actually visited; the only clue is a brief mention in the book's acknowledgements that she's been to Rome, Santiago and Iona. There is nothing in the way of on-the-spot reportage.

> **"Walking in the footsteps of millions of pilgrims down the ages cannot fail to have an impact"**

Instead, she offers well-turned historical accounts of each place, picking out its distinctive features, rituals and traditions, and making links to other shrines. These are often thought-provoking but never quite amount to a thread or theme that binds together the text. That 130 of the pages – more than a quarter of the total – are given over to notes reveals the academic foundations of the narrative.

One feature of pilgrimage is that it means a multitude of different things to different people. It can be a chance to step back from life and reflect, or to plunge more deeply into existing attachments; an exercise in hope, penance or restitution; a time of solitude or companionship while searching out the spiritual dimension in a secular world.

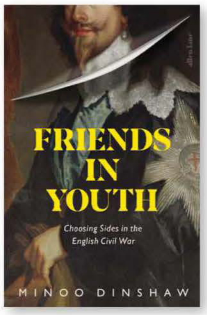
For some, this cool, objective, factual examination of pilgrimage will be warmly welcomed. For me, the absence of emotion, turmoil and yearning renders it a little too rational for its subject matter. ◼

Peter Stanford is a writer, broadcaster and author of *Pilgrimage: Journeys of Meaning* (Thames & Hudson, 2021)

CIVIL WAR

Divided loyalties

RONALD HUTTON is impressed by a look at the lives of two men riven by the conflict between king and parliament



Friends in Youth: Choosing Sides in the English Civil War
by Minoo Dinshaw
Allen Lane, 544 pages, £30

Some history books are very clearly labours of love. This is one such, devoted to a topic that most scholars would neglect as too tangential to the mainstream – yet making a success of it. The author has an aptitude for biography, and uses it here to discuss the careers of two prominent figures in the politics of the mid-17th century, Edward Hyde and Bulstrode Whitelocke.

These men were on opposing sides in the Civil War, and their lives followed very different trajectories in subsequent decades. Hyde was a royalist who spent a decade and a half in exile after the war, returning in triumph at the Restoration to become Earl of Clarendon and chief royal minister before ending up once more a fugitive, dying overseas. Bulstrode was a parliamentarian, and a leading figure in the regimes that followed the victory of his cause before falling from power in 1659; he spent the rest of his long life in political eclipse and slightly precarious retirement.

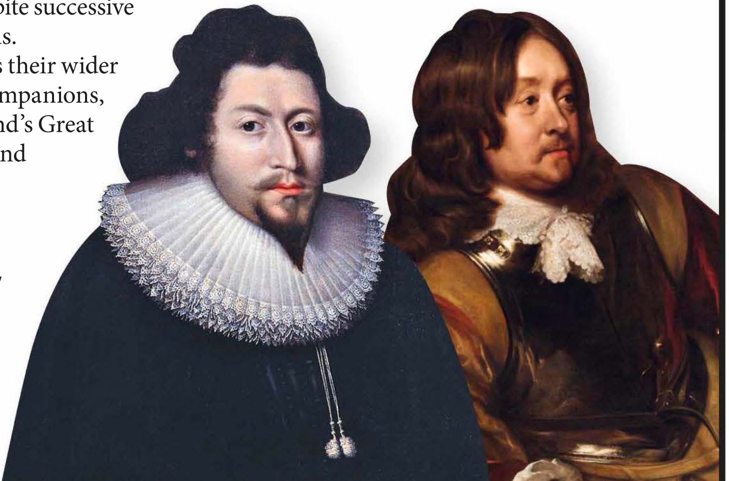
The book traces their stories from their youth to the later stages of the war, making the fundamental point that they had been friends until the crisis that produced the conflict. Their regard for each other, and their similarity of outlook on politics and religion, persisted even after then. It powered the desire of both for a negotiated end to the fighting, which was frustrated despite successive overtures and negotiations.

The story also involves their wider coterie of like-minded companions, especially in Lord Falkland's Great Tew Circle in the 1630s, and recounts how these also became divided by the conflict of the next decade. The overall message is how difficult, complex, provisional and unpredictable the choice of side in the war was for the ambitious and able young men involved, thus deepening our understanding of it.

There are some minor problems with the book. Its author's lack of profound knowledge of the period as a whole results in a sprinkling of errors of detail and of doubtful judgments on matters tangential to his main interests. The work is structured like a series of sliding panels, successive chapters moving forwards and backwards in time as the fortunes of different characters are followed, which breaks up an overall sense of unfolding events. It ends abruptly and arbitrarily, and without apparent reason, with the death of Falkland in battle before the mid-point of the war, when previous sections have taken readers almost to its end.

Nevertheless, as well as the valuable overall message summed up above, Dinshaw's book provides much extra information both on the lives of the people concerned and on the events in which they were involved, especially with respect to the parliamentary debates leading to the conflict and the peace talks that took place in the course of it. Moreover, the whole thing is beautifully written – the work of an author who instinctually uses language expertly to entertain as well as to elucidate. For both its main argument and its supporting mass of rich detail, therefore, it deserves congratulation.

Ronald Hutton is professor of history at the University of Bristol

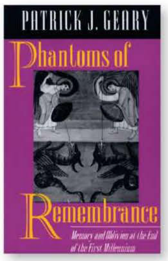


Parliamentarian Bulstrode Whitelocke (left) and his friend, royalist Edward Hyde, were opponents in the Civil War

ALAMY

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Levi Roach on a **groundbreaking look at medieval culture and history**



Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium
by Patrick Geary
(Princeton University Press, 1994)

This book marked a milestone in the study of the European Middle Ages. Geary's starting point is deceptively simple: the observation that practices of human remembrance have their own distinctive history. Because medieval memorial culture conditioned the sorts of texts that were preserved into the early modern and modern eras, this has significant implications.

The central argument is that western Europe saw a sea change in attitudes and practices of remembrance around the year 1000, characterised by new efforts to systematise institutional and local memories. These not only set the parameters for how we see the era, but also how we view earlier periods, because the relevant documents have all been refracted through this late 10th-century lens.

Many important sources for earlier centuries survive only in copies from the turn of the millennium (or later). Even those for which we have earlier witnesses owe their preservation to the fact that people around the year 1000 thought these were worth keeping. Geary's book thus forces historians to confront the awkward fact that the sources we have for the Middle Ages are not a random cross-section of what once existed but, rather, a carefully curated selection.

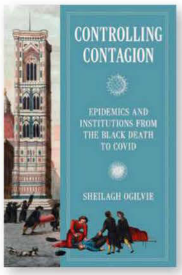
Geary's arguments have been superseded on points of detail, but his overarching thesis remains as fresh and compelling as it was in 1994. My own 2021 book on memory and identity in the late 10th-century church in many respects explores the implications of his findings.

Levi Roach is professor of medieval history at the University of Exeter

MEDICINE

Infectious material

VIRGINIA BERRIDGE is intrigued by a look at how various institutions have attempted to halt the spread of transmissible diseases through the centuries



Controlling Contagion: Epidemics and Institutions from the Black Death to Covid
by Sheilagh Ogilvie
Princeton University Press,
544 pages, £38

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic was met by much discussion about which methods of control work best. Should other states adopt the severe lockdowns enforced in China? Didn't similar mortality and case numbers eventuate in Sweden, a country that prided itself on not locking down? The debate was never entirely settled and, as time passed, the severe lockdowns of the early phase of the pandemic fell out of favour.

Shelagh Ogilvie's book ranges from the 14th century – the era of the Black Death – to the 21st with the aim of providing answers to this conundrum. She identifies six institutions – market, state, community, religion, guild and family – that have played a role in the transmission and control of contagion. Considering each in turn, she aims to produce 'best buy' conclusions.

The backdrop is a positive one. The risks of epidemics have declined considerably in the past seven centuries. Public health researchers talk about the 'epidemiological transition' – the change from a period of epidemic infection to one of non-communicable disease such as heart disease, with longer life expectancy. But this doesn't apply universally and, even in western societies, new diseases including Aids, SARS and Covid-19 have upset the comfortable certainty that the age of infectious illness is over.

Ogilvie's wide-ranging survey throws up some telling points. Being poor in an epidemic is generally a bad thing. State capacity plays an important role but, beyond that, state motivation – combining political realities and scientific knowledge – is also telling. The structure of municipal government makes a difference. German town government had a more authoritarian structure and could move faster to introduce sewerage and clean water in the later 19th century than more democratic local government in England and the US. It wasn't the power of the state that mattered by itself.

Social capital also comes into the picture. During epidemics, local communities sometimes resisted anticontagion measures including sanitation, and there was also longstanding community opposition to interventions such as vaccination. But closely knit communities could also mobilise collective action to support measures such as social distancing. Ogilvie exposes some cherished fallacies, including the legend that the inhabitants of the small lead-mining village of Eyam in Derbyshire sacrificed themselves in the interests of contagion control. In truth, villagers who could not afford to flee early were kept penned up by the nearby city of Sheffield, which paid constables to hem them in.

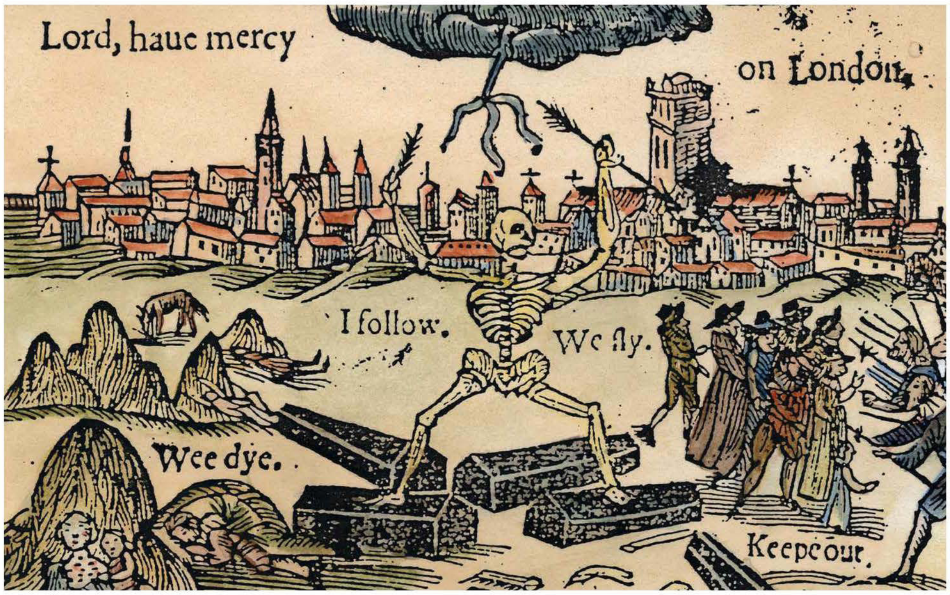
> **"New diseases including Aids, SARS and Covid-19 have upset the comfortable certainty that the age of infectious illness is over"**

The role of religion and of the family is subject to similar mythbusting. 'Amoral familism' (looking only after your immediate family) and 'family protection' (strong family ties to vulnerable relatives) can work in opposite directions, hindering or enhancing contagion control.

So what's the conclusion? Ogilvie ends by some 'on the one hand' and 'on the other' type comments. All of her institutions have their good and bad sides, dependent on the context. However, a good framework would include a diverse number of institutions and a market to produce innovation, moderated by a state powerful enough to step in.

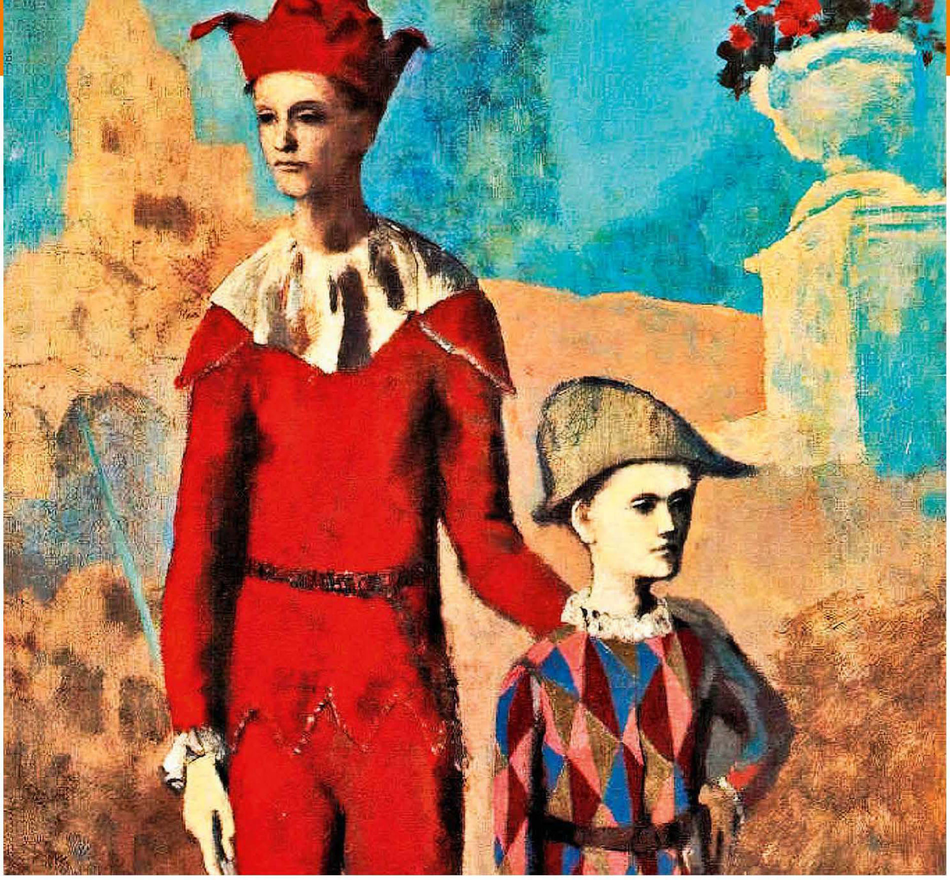
Ogilvie is optimistic: between the Black Death and Covid-19, societies learned how to coordinate and how to innovate. We must wait until the next pandemic to see what institutional combinations will produce.

Virginia Berridge is professor of history and health policy at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine


Lord, haue mercy
on London.
I follow.
We fly.
Wee dye.
Keepeout.

TOPFOTO

Death watch A contemporary woodcut depicts the Great Plague assailing London in 1665, and shows attempts to prevent fleeing Londoners from spreading the disease outside the city



In the pink *Acrobat and Young Harlequin* by Pablo Picasso, painted in 1905 at the outset of the artist's 'Rose Period'. "Pastoureau has a knack for selecting illuminating moments in the hue's history," says Kassia St Clair

CULTURAL

Shade stories

Michel Pastoureau
PINK
The History of a Color

Pink: The History of a Colour
by Michel Pastoureau
Princeton University Press,
192 pages, £35

One of the earliest known recipes for a pink dye, written in Tuscany around 1480, promised "a beautiful rosy hue". You only needed brazilwood, chalk, tartar and "if you can, the urine of an ass, but moderately. If you do not have ass urine, that of a drunk man will do." An inauspicious start for a colour associated with romance.

Michel Pastoureau is known for his excellent scholarly monographs on European colour history. The past 25 years have seen the publication of *Blue, Black, Green, Red*, *Yellow* and *White*. *Pink* is the first of his studies into a wider chromatic range that will include orange, purple, grey and brown.

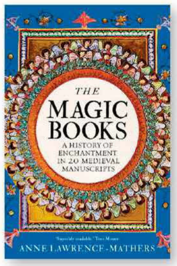
Pink is, like its forebears, a social history, organised first chronologically then into short thematic essays that explore different aspects of a colour's history. As always, Pastoureau has a knack for selecting illuminating moments in the hue's history. In one chapter we learn about the pale flesh tones of Egyptian encaustic funerary portraits, and in another how Madame de Pompadour influenced the manufacture of porcelain at Sèvres; later we are treated to a foray into Picasso's 'Rose (pink) Period'. Here is a description of Roman brick making; there is Jackie Kennedy in her pink suit in 1961.

If this sounds disparate, that's because it is. Pastoureau seems to have found it difficult to find recurring motifs or steady threads to pull him (and us) through the subject, to create a cohesive whole. This perhaps reflects our own ambivalence: as he points out, though pink is observable in nature it was late to get a name of its own. Indeed, the first line of the book poses the question: "Is pink a colour in its own right?"

Kassia St Clair, historian and author of *The Secret Lives of Colour* (John Murrray, 2016)

MEDIEVAL

Charms and crosses



The Magic Books
by Anne Lawrence-Mathers
Yale University Press,
368 pages, £30

There is a persistent idea that the Catholic church was trapped in a fierce battle against magic for much of the medieval period. Though Anne Lawrence-Mathers' beautifully illustrated new book doesn't put paid to the notion entirely, it at least adds considerable nuance.

In a tour of 20 books ranging in origin from the Carolingian empire to early Tudor England, she exposes the complicated and often pragmatic relationship between Christian elites and the supernatural. In theory, medieval churchmen condemned magical practice. The argument ran that anything supernatural, from predicting the future to communicating with the dead, was realised through demons and should thus be avoided on pain of death (of one's immortal soul – the actual death penalty was more patchily applied). In practice the line was much more blurry, as the vast number of surviving magical texts created by, and housed within, monastic institutions shows.

One reason was the co-dependent relationship between the church and Europe's various secular rulers. The church's power relied on the support and patronage of monarchs and local leaders, many of whom demanded the kinds of reassurance that only magic could offer. One solution was to develop a theory of magic that could be accommodated within a Christian paradigm.

An example is Ælfwine's Prayerbook, created for the 11th-century dean of Winchester's New Minster. It contains an 'alphabet prognostic' that might have been used to predict the future for Ælfwine's patrons, King Cnut and Queen Emma of Normandy. Along similar lines, the 13th-century King Alfonso X ('the Learned') of Castile commissioned a translation of the *Picatrix,* in part to fuel his imperial ambitions. Originally an Arabic text, the *Picatrix* included detailed instructions on how to summon and control spirits.

Such manuscripts demonstrate the complex knowledge networks that spanned the religious, linguistic and cultural lines of medieval Europe. They also offer insights into the priorities and ambitions of the medieval elite, both secular and ecclesiastical.

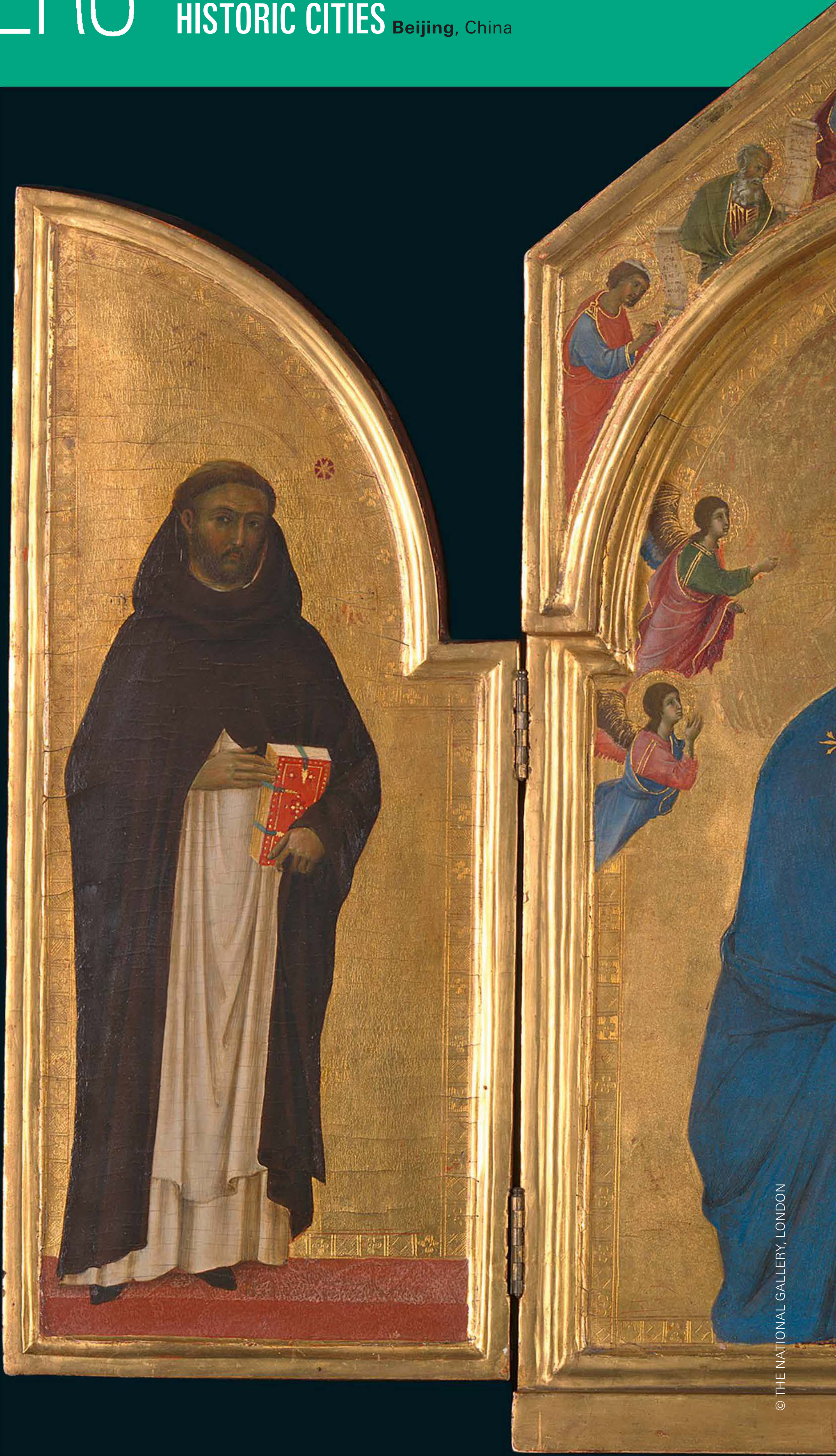
Authoritative and accessible, this book is an entertaining and insightful companion to an often hidden history.

Tabitha Stanmore, author of *Cunning Folk: Life in the Era of Practical Magic* (Bodley Head, 2024)

ALAMY

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By **Jonathan Wright** and **Danny Bird**
HISTORY COOKBOOK **Easter simnel cake**
HISTORIC CITIES **Beijing**, China


© THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

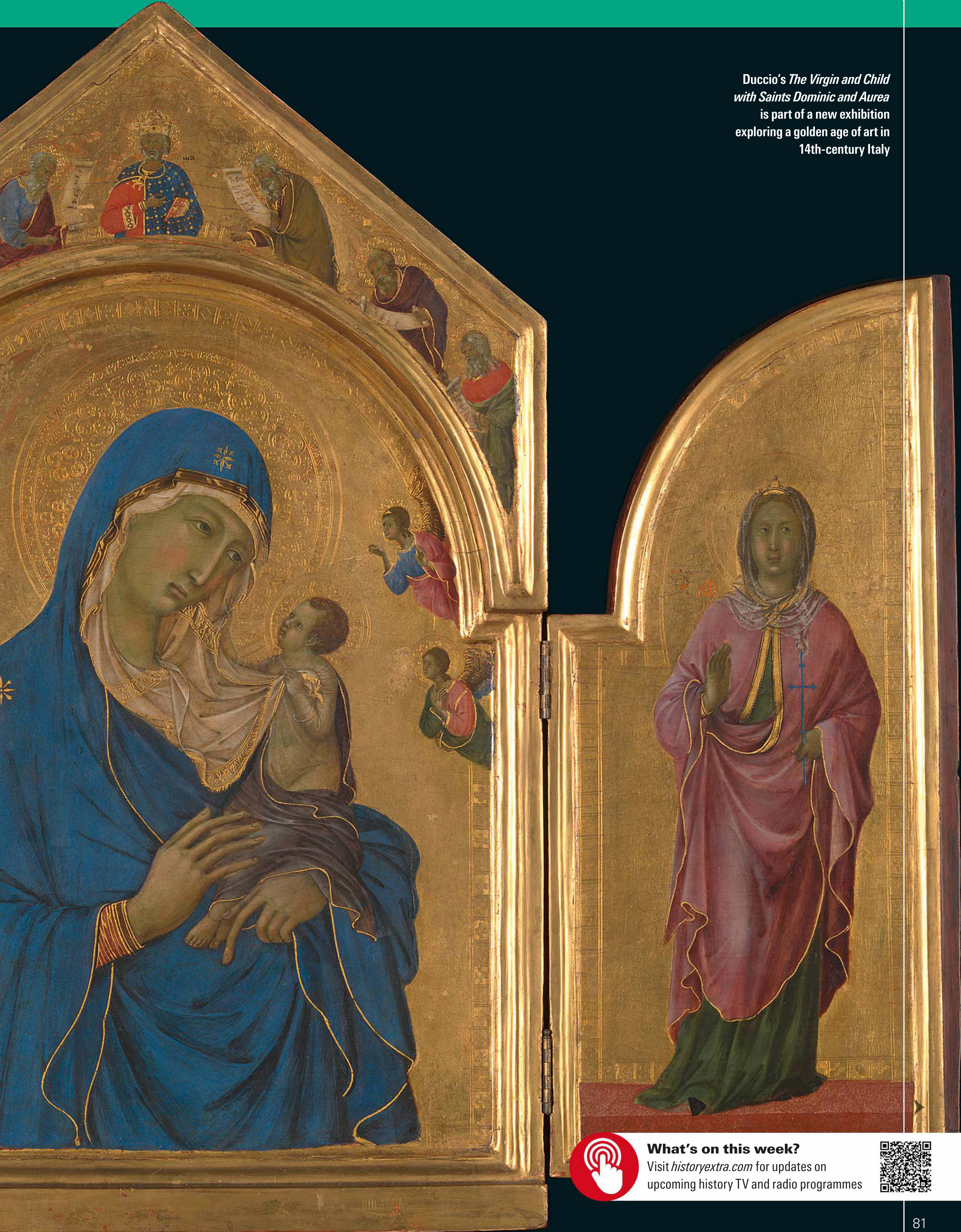
EXHIBITION

Roots of the Renaissance

Step into the golden age of 14th-century Siena, where art sparked a revolution. A new exhibition, staged as part of the National Gallery's bicentenary celebrations, reunites scenes from Duccio di Buoninsegna's monumental *Maestà* panels, Simone Martini's Orsini Polyptych and works by the Lorenzetti brothers.

There are over 100 masterpieces on show, including paintings, gilded glass and ivories, which reveal how Sienese creativity ignited Europe's artistic transformation.

Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300–1350
The National Gallery, London / Until 22 June / *nationalgallery.org.uk*



Duccio's *The Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea* is part of a new exhibition exploring a golden age of art in 14th-century Italy

What's on this week?
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes

EXHIBITIONS

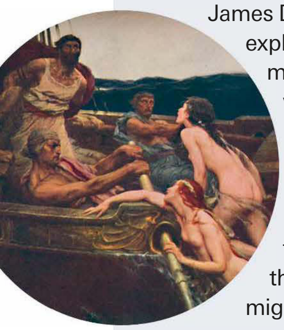
Edvard Munch Portraits

National Portrait Gallery, London / Until 15 June / *npg.org.uk*

The haunting work of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944) takes centre stage at the National Portrait Gallery this spring. Best known for his searing masterpiece, *The Scream*, Munch's radical approach to portraiture, capturing identity and inner turmoil with striking intensity, is revealed in the displays.

Sirens, Women and the Sea

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull / Until 5 May / *hullmuseums.co.uk*



From a fifth-century BC Greek vase to Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces by Herbert James Draper, this exhibition explores the history of the mythological creatures whose song could be so deadly. It also features contemporary artists like Abe Odedina and Emma Stibbon and reveals how the legends connect to themes of climate change, migration and gender fluidity.

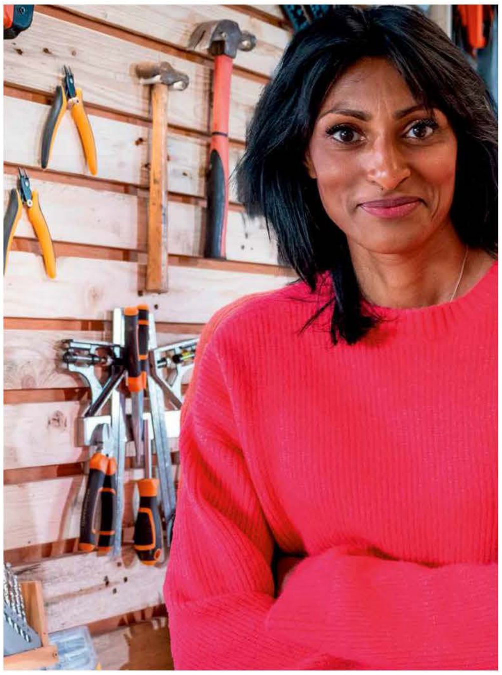
Animated Activism: Women Empowered

Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery, Leeds / Until 20 December / *library.leeds.ac.uk*

This powerful exhibition tells the story of two pioneering 1970s organisations, Women's Aid and Leeds Animation Workshop, that turned activism into lasting change. Newsletters, protest banners and films are among the exhibits that reveal a shared legacy of grassroots advocacy, campaigning for refuge, rights and representation.

HOME TRUTHS
a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.
Womens Aid.
WOMEN FIGHT
Tables Turned
YBA WIFE
MY OLD MAN'S A BASTARD
FILMS FROM LEEDS
National Women's Aid Federation
Battered

Archive material from two pioneering activist organisations is part of a Leeds show exploring half a century of struggle for women's rights



Dr Shini Somara presents a series putting the vintage *Practical Mechanics* magazine through its paces

TV

Vintage makeovers

Published from 1933-63, *Practical Mechanics* was a magazine advising its readers on how they might build everything from bathtubs to boats, and even – possibly of use if the Cold War had turned hot – a Geiger counter.

Mechanical engineer Dr Shini Somara seeks to find out how these designs and blueprints hold up, overseeing teams of fellow engineers, crafters and gadgeteers charged with making the magazine's projects fit for the modern world. The first of six episodes follows the updating of a 1950 camping trailer design and a 1960 two-seater toboggan.

Masters of Reinvention
U&Yesterday / Monday 17 March

Blindfolded German officers are led through British lines on the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, April 1945

TV

Documenting the horror

On 15 April 1945, two British soldier-cameramen serving with the Army Film and Photographic Unit accompanied troops to a site in northern Germany. Sergeants Mike Lewis and Bill Lawrie expected to find a typhus hospital. At around the same time that the BBC's Richard Dimbleby reported seeing emaciated survivors lying with their heads on corpses, they entered the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Eight decades later, the footage they captured forms the basis of the first documentary to be directed by Academy Award winner Sam Mendes, *What They Found*. The film features audio from interviews conducted with Lewis and Lawrie in the 1980s and held by the Imperial War Museum.

BBC Two is also screening *Simon Schama: The Holocaust – 80 Years On*, a documentary that considers the mass exterminations of the Second World War as a European-wide crime. Why, for example, did fewer Jewish people survive in the Netherlands than in any other occupied western European nation? Featuring an interview with 98-year-old survivor Marian Turski (who died in February), the documentary also captures stories of resistance and shows the emotional toll of Schama's first ever visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

What They Found & Simon Schama: The Holocaust – 80 Years On
BBC Two, April

TOPFOTO/LEEDS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, WOMEN'S AID FEDERATION OF ENGLAND, LEEDS ANIMATION WORKSHOP AND FEMINIST ARCHIVE NORTH/UKTV/ILLIBERALE ©AUTENTIC GMBH.JPG

The hit musical *SIX*, about the six wives of Henry VIII, jumps to the silver screen this April

FILM

Girl power

It's an outlandish idea, but it works. Premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017, *SIX*, created by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, is a musical comedy that recasts Henry VIII's wives as contestants in a singing competition. Cue Catherine of Aragon et al introducing themselves via biographical songs and, as the musical progresses, reclaiming their own identities rather than being seen through the prism of their marriages.

Filmed at the Vaudeville Theatre on the Strand, *SIX the Musical Live!* features the original West End cast, each of whom plays characters modelled on composites of real-life stars. To put that another way, any resemblance between Katherine Parr, Alicia Keys and Emeli Sandé is entirely intentional.

SIX the Musical Live!

In cinemas from Sunday 6 April

Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche star in *The Return*, a drama based on Homer's *Odyssey*, directed by Uberto Pasolini

FILM

Homeward bound

Reuniting the stars of the award-winning *The English Patient*, Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche, and based on the latter sections of Homer's *Odyssey*, *The Return* begins with Odysseus washing up naked on Ithaca. This isn't the proud warrior king who left to fight in the Trojan War, but a man scarred both physically and mentally by what he has been through.

He's also not a traveller who finds himself welcomed. Instead, a final battle lies ahead as, unrecognised, he tries to make his way back to the heart of his own kingdom and family. Meantime, Penelope plays for time as she tries to ward off suitors convinced Odysseus is dead.

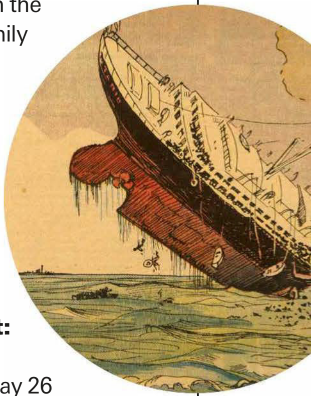
The Return

In cinemas from Friday 11 April

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Family fortunes

Narrated by Paul McGann, **Titanic: Ship of Dreams** (BBC Sounds, Tuesday 8 April) is an immersive and, at 13 episodes, exhaustive retelling of the doomed liner's story (pictured). It draws you in – especially the first episode where McGann and his brother, *Call the Midwife* star Stephen, discuss their great uncle James, who was born in the Liverpool slums to a family who had fled famine in Ireland and worked aboard the ship.

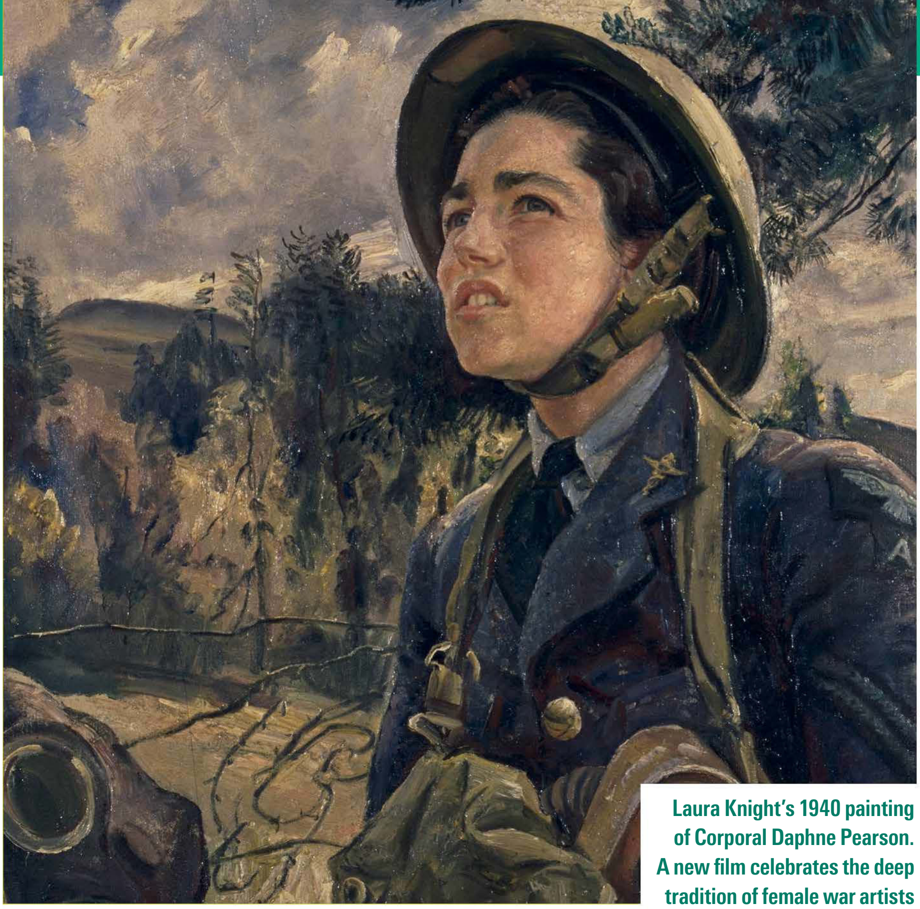


Ideas around free market capitalism shape how we live today, and David Dimbleby explores how this happened in **The History Podcast: The Invisible Hands** (BBC Radio 4, Wednesday 26 March). He goes back to the Battle of Britain and a Hurricane pilot, Antony Fisher, who watched his fellow pilot and brother, Basil, go down in flames. At that moment, Fisher vowed to defend the cause of freedom for the rest of his life. In the wake of the conflict, he interpreted this as keeping government out of the lives of ordinary people. A successful businessman, he would go on to found an influential think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs.

The **Archive on 4** strand is consistently one of the highlights of the week on BBC Radio 4. Forthcoming episodes include **Section 28: Right to Be Gay** (Saturday 22 March) on a law introduced in 1988 that forbade local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality, but which was repealed in Scotland, England and Wales between 2000 and 2003. Presented by actor and activist Michael Cashman, it's a subject that has contemporary echoes in the era of culture wars.

On Saturday 5 April, **Against the Current: The Great Gatsby at 100** finds writer Sarah Churchwell arguing that F Scott Fitzgerald's saga of the Jazz Age has long been, and continues to be, misunderstood.

Meanwhile, **A Child of Rover** (Saturday 29 March) tells the story of Rover. Founded in 1904, the company made the Mini but also the much-lampooned Austin Allegro. Nathalie Olah, most of whose family worked at Rover's vast Longbridge plant, trawls through the archives for an episode that also features new interviews with ex-employees.



Laura Knight's 1940 painting of Corporal Daphne Pearson. A new film celebrates the deep tradition of female war artists

FILM

The female gaze

Is there something distinctive about the work of female war artists? At the front line, do they see things that male artists miss? These are questions that lie at the heart of the latest programme from Margy Kinmonth. *War Paint – Women at War* is the completion of a trilogy of documentaries that began with *War Art with Eddie Redmayne* (2015) and continued with *Eric Ravilious – Drawn to War* (2022).

Depicting conflict has traditionally been seen as the preserve of men, but the roll call of those featured – including Turner winner Dame Rachel Whiteread, Ukrainian artist Zhanna Kadyrova and American photographer Lee Miller – makes clear there is a deep tradition of female war artists. H

War Paint – Women at War
In cinemas from Friday 28 March

GAMES / A Bohemian blockbuster

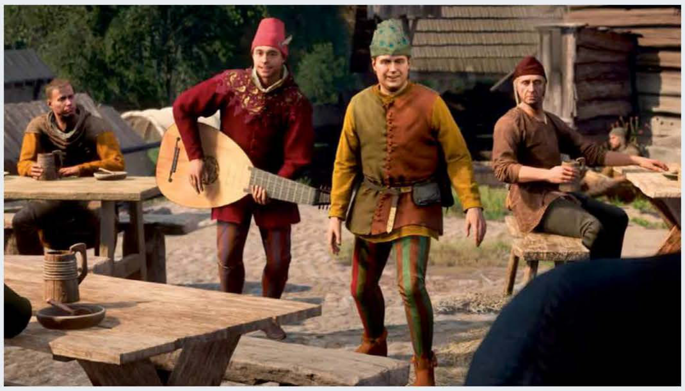
Historical accuracy and impressive world-building are at the heart of this role-playing video game set in the tumultuous world of medieval Bohemia

Kingdom Come
Deliverance
II

Kingdom Come: Deliverance II
Warhorse Studios / £59.99

When *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* launched in 2018, it was heralded as one of the most historically faithful and rigorously researched video games to date. Now, the Czech games developer Warhorse Studios returns with *Kingdom Come: Deliverance II*, an open-world, role-playing game continuing the tale in medieval Bohemia of Henry, a blacksmith's son who finds himself elevated beyond his usual status.

The narrative is steeped in the political and social turmoil of the early 15th century and a nuanced, complex backdrop of religious tensions, particularly between Catholics and the proto-Protestant Hussites. It's largely situated within a beautifully rendered rural landscape, dotted with painstakingly detailed towns and villages. These are functioning communities with realistic social hierarchies, period-accurate architecture and agricultural practices – all rooted in historical evidence.



The sequel to *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* immerses its players in the world of medieval Bohemia and the chaos of the Hussite Wars

The game is brought to life by an expansive range of characters who live structured daily routines. While interacting with a plethora of memorable quests, you're also tasked with maintaining Henry's hygiene, eating regularly, and navigating a complex social web where reputation matters. Commit a crime, and the townspeople will react with fear or hostility; build a good reputation, and doors will open. Laws are enforced realistically, and actions have consequences.

It's a common gripe that blockbuster games such as this play out like interactive movies where control is constantly wrested from the player in favour of cutscenes: non-interactive cinematic sequences pausing the gameplay to show the story. And this game does suffer from an abundance of them. It's a minor quibble, though, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance II* is, at its heart, a historian's game offering a first-class gaming experience. H

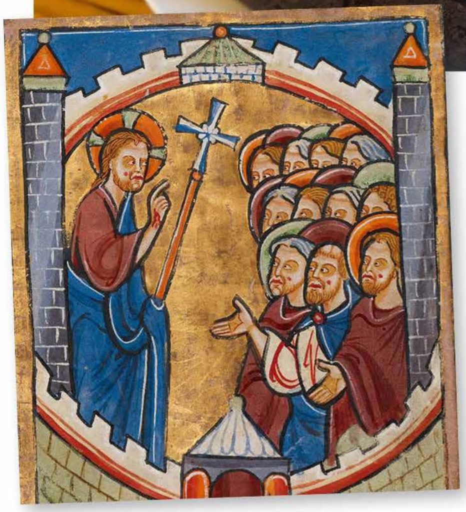
James Osborne, digital content editor for HistoryExtra

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS/WARHORSE STUDIOS

RECIPE

Easter simnel cake

ELEANOR BARNETT bakes a sweet confection that originally offered Christians a respite from tedious Lenten dishes



The simnel cake is topped with 11 marzipan balls representing the apostles of Jesus, who are pictured in a 12th-century miniature (left)

Once an Easter essential, simnel cake is harder to come by these days, overshadowed by copious amounts of chocolate. This is such a shame, because it's a delicious, light and visually spectacular fruit cake with a burst of nuttiness provided by the melted marzipan layer in the middle. It is often decorated with 11 marzipan balls representing Jesus's disciples – minus the treacherous Judas.

According to a legend with its roots in the Victorian era, simnel cake was created when a couple named Simon and Nelly argued about what treat they should make with some leftover unleavened dough. Simon wanted to boil it, whereas Nelly insisted it should be baked. In the end, they reached a compromise: the dough would be boiled then baked in a kind of pastry. Simon and Nelly's names were later merged to form the name of their creation: simnel cake.

There is, of course, little truth in that tale. What we do know is that, before it was eaten on Easter Sunday, simnel cake was enjoyed on Mothering Sunday, during the 40-day Christian fasting period of Lent. Though we now celebrate mums on this date, in its original iteration this was a day when each Christian would return to their mother church or native diocese. It also offered an opportunity to relax Lenten fasting rules: eggy and dairy-based treats were briefly permitted back on the menu before churchgoers completed their period of penitential self-denial.

The word 'simnel' actually derives from the Latin *simila*, a reference to the finest, whitest flour; the earliest simnel cakes were likely yeast-risen fancy breads. By the 17th century, the bread had become a batter that often incorporated dried fruits, spices and almonds, and was boiled like a pudding. By the end of the 19th century, simnel cakes had become more cake-like, though it was only in the middle of the 20th century that the iconic marzipan balls were added.

This version is adapted from Mabel A Rotheram's *Household Cookery Recipes* (1901). You can buy ready-made marzipan if you prefer, but I've included Mabel's recipe below, which creates a much less sugary – and, I think, more delicious – marzipan, for very little effort. She recommended decorating the cake with sugared nuts or fruits and dusting with icing sugar, but you can of course make those 11 disciple marzipan balls, too. I've combined both for an extra-special look. H

TOPFOTO/ELEANOR BARNETT

Serves: 12–24
Difficulty: 2/10
Time taken: 1 hour prep; 2 hours baking

INGREDIENTS

For the cake
170g butter
225g caster sugar
½ tsp mixed spice
4 medium eggs
300g plain flour
340g currants
112g candied peel
½ tsp baking powder
Juice of half a lemon
800g marzipan (see recipe below or buy)
Icing sugar
Dried fruit to decorate

For the marzipan
225g caster sugar
450g ground almonds
56g unsalted butter (melted)
2 medium eggs
Icing sugar

METHOD

To make the marzipan

1. Mix caster sugar and almonds.
2. Separate egg whites and yolks, saving the yolks; whisk the whites into stiff peaks.
3. Make a well in the middle of the sugar mixture and add whisked whites, melted butter and yolks.
4. Dust the mixture with icing sugar and work into a paste. Refrigerate for 2 hours.

To make the cake

1. Grease and line an 8-inch (20cm) cake tin, and preheat oven to Gas Mark 4/180°C (160°C fan).
2. Cream butter and sugar, add mixed spice and beat in three eggs, one at a time.
3. Stir in the flour, currants, candied peel, baking powder and lemon juice.
4. Roll out marzipan to 0.5cm thickness on a surface dusted with icing sugar. Divide into two, leaving a little extra to make balls if wanted. Cut each half into a circle, using the cake tin as a template.
5. Place half the cake mixture in the tin, then a layer of marzipan, then the rest of the cake mixture.
6. Bake for 90 minutes.
7. Remove from the oven, top with the second half of the marzipan (and balls, if using), brush with beaten egg and return to the oven for another 30 minutes.
8. Decorate with more dried fruit and dust with icing sugar.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo) is out now

Beijing
in five places

The history of China's capital is one of conquest, destruction and modernisation. **JONATHAN CLEMENTS** picks five sites that reveal this cycle of transformation

❶ Zhoukoudian
First man

Let's go right back to the dawn of time – albeit by metro, travelling to the far south-west of the city – to Zhoukoudian. In the 19th century, apothecaries came here looking for what they called 'dragon bones'. They'd pick out these fossils from the mound known as Dragon Bone Hill, and grind them up to make medicines.

In the 1920s, locals led Swedish geologist Johan Gunnar Andersson and American palaeontologist Walter W Granger to the site, which the scientists realised would be a prime location in which to search for pre-human relics. Later excavations unearthed fossil remains from a hominid, which was initially called *Sinanthropus pekinensis* – literally Chinese man of Peking, or Peking Man.

Today it's a site of world archaeological importance, where the earliest known inhabitants of the Beijing area lived for at least a quarter of a million years, from perhaps 770,000 years ago. It's humbling to look up at this huge limestone rock face, riddled with clefts in which remains of our early human ancestors (now classed as *Homo erectus*), and the stone tools they used, built up over tens of thousands of years.

A bust of the so-called Peking Man, an early human ancestor, at Zhoukoudian in greater Beijing

Boats ferry tourists from the Qianhai Lake, one of the remnants of the waterways created by the Mongols

❷ Shichahai
Canal dreams

Today the Shichahai neighbourhood, a little north of the Forbidden City, is a hipster district known for bars, clubs and little shops selling kebabs. But the reason it's exciting historically relates to the Mongol era, starting from 1272 when Kublai Khan, having conquered China, moved the capital of his new Yuan dynasty to Dadu ('Great Capital', or in Mongol, *Khanbaliq*) – which is what's now Beijing.

One of the first things that the Mongols did when they came to power was to renovate the old Grand Canal, stretching as far south as the Yangtze delta. Eventually a branch was constructed all the way into the heart of Beijing. If you go to Shichahai today, you'll find restaurants and cafes set around a network of artificial lakes – but they're not lakes: they are the last remnants of this massive inland harbour that was the terminus for the Grand Canal, of such great importance to the Mongols.

❸ Goldfish Hutong & Malls at Oriental Plaza
Echoes of everyday life

During the reconstruction of the city after it was ravaged by Genghis Khan in 1215 – and once again after the Manchus took over in 1644 – alleys called *hutong* were built, lined with *siheyuan* (courtyard houses) set around wells and walled gardens. Many were ultimately repurposed as social housing by the People's Republic of China – then, like so much of Beijing's heritage, were bulldozed in the late 20th century to make way for tower blocks and shopping malls.

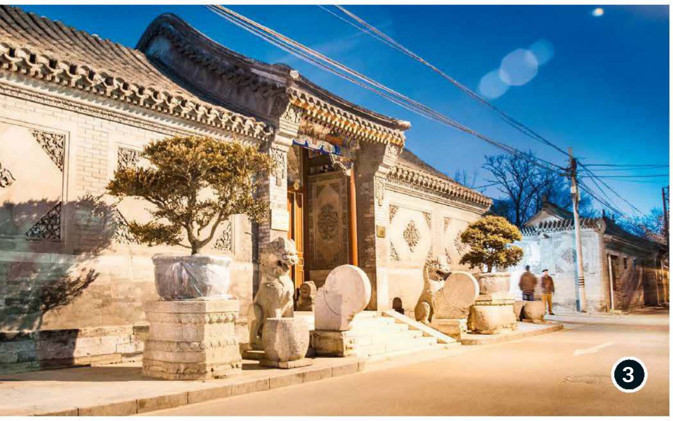
Just a few of the old *hutong* neighbourhoods survive, offering fascinating glimpses into daily life in Beijing's past. One is Jinyu, or Goldfish Hutong, still comprising single-storey houses and set incongruously behind the Malls at Oriental Plaza on the commercial thoroughfare of Wangfujing Street. Another surprising aspect of this shopping centre lies in the basement, where the Wangfujing Paleolithic Museum is set on the site of a prehistoric deer-hunters' camp, and displays bones and a few artefacts from that era.

A statue of the famous Chinese philosopher in the Temple of Confucius

❹ Temple of Confucius
Official visit

Most group tours visit the Tibetan Buddhist Lama Temple, built in 1694. And it's worth a look, with its beautiful arches, statues, frescoes and so on. But it gets hectic – so to find a little peace, duck out and head for the nearby Temple of Confucius, the second-largest in China. Built in 1302 under Kublai Khan's successor, the Emperor Chengzong (or Temür Khan), it's a lovely complex of courtyards linked by ornate arches, home to numerous stone stelae of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties.

Here, degrees were conferred upon those who passed the civil service exams. It's packed with historical oddities, including a cypress tree that will reputedly knock the hat off a corrupt official if one walks by. There are classical Chinese music and dance performances in the courtyards, which don't tend to be advertised outside, so listen out for those.



Beijing still boasts its centuries-old neighbourhoods built around *hutong*, a type of narrow street

ALAMY/DREAMSTIME

One of the shopping streets in Dazhalan, a thriving merchant community near Tiananmen Square

❺ Dazhalan/Dashilar
Merchant quarter

Not far south of Tiananmen Square, just below the Gate of the Zenith Sun, stretches a network of little streets that's been a thriving merchant community for decades. It's officially named Dazhalan, but – as I discovered to my cost – in the local accent it's Dashilar. In recent years it's become rather touristy and plastic, but it's still home to some shops that have been trading since the Manchu-led Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912). One of them, Ruifuxiang, is the silk store where the first red flag for the Communist party was made.

I love wandering the back streets, dodging people trying to sell me plastic machine-guns and Spider-Man masks, to search out the old pharmacies, the city's first cinema and other echoes of old Beijing. H

……

Jonathan Clements is a writer and broadcaster. His books include *A Short History of Beijing* (Haus, 2022). He was speaking to travel writer Paul Bloomfield, host of our podcast series *History's Greatest Cities*

HISTORY'S GREATEST CITIES

EXPLORE MORE HISTORICAL CITIES ON **HISTORYEXTRA**

In *History's Greatest Cities*, host Paul Bloomfield is joined by historians to roam, virtually, the streets of a selection of global cities, discovering their fascinating histories – and getting insider tips for travelling to the historic heart of each destination. Listen to the complete collection now: *historyextra.com/greatest-cities*

PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

1 Battle of ____ Hill, February 1881, in which the British were routed by the Boers (6)

4 Former Soviet republic that was devastated by a 1932–33 famine resulting from Stalin's collectivisation policy (7)

10 Royal house that provided three kings of England in the 14th and 15th centuries (9)

11 Surname of husband and wife physicists who shared the Nobel Prize in 1903 (5)

12 Electronic location system, vital to Britain's air defences during the Battle of Britain (5)

13 Former artillery ammunition consisting of small, tightly packed balls (9)

14 Nasa programme that prepared the way for the Apollo moon landing missions (6)

16 Ancient Mesopotamian city, in Sumerian mythology the home of the storm god, Enlil (6)

19/20 Key figure of the American civil rights movement and a close advisor to Martin Luther King Jr (6,6)

22 King of England deposed by the man he had once exiled, Henry Bolingbroke (7,2)

25 Robert ____, Elizabeth I's principal spymaster from 1590 (5)

26 Very little is known of the author of this (and one other) major ancient Greek epic poem (5)

27 Non-Roman troops bound by treaty to fight for the Roman empire (9)

28 Henry Stuart, Lord ____, second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots and father of her son, later James I (7)

29 Term applied to the movement for the union of Cyprus with Greece (6)

Down

1 Sir Thomas ____, whose tales of King Arthur were published by Caxton in 1485 (6)

2 19th-century debutante who went on to endear herself to the Bedouin in Syria and marry a sheikh (4,5)

3 Author George Orwell's real surname (5)

5 See 7 down

6 Swiss physician 'Paracelsus' was a famous 16th-century one (9)

7/5 Released from Japanese control by the Soviet Union after the Second World War, this state became a Democratic People's Republic in 1948 (5,5)

8 The last Anglo-Saxon archbishop of Canterbury, controversially appointed in 1052 (7)

9 Last name of German-born British founder of an international news agency in 1851 (6)

15 Youngest of eight daughters, she had eight children herself, one of whom was William Shakespeare (4,5)

17 The Roman destruction of Carthage in 146 BC brought an end to these conflicts (5,4)

18 Old-fashioned name for a (lighter) match (7)

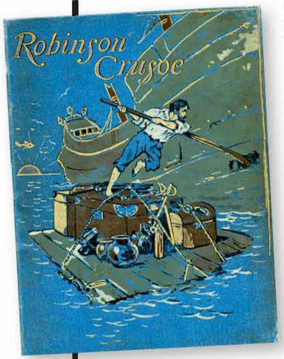
19 Powerful Italian family, originally from Valencia, Spain, that flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries (6)

21 '____ Indians', Native American peoples such as those who followed the great herds of bison across the interior (6)

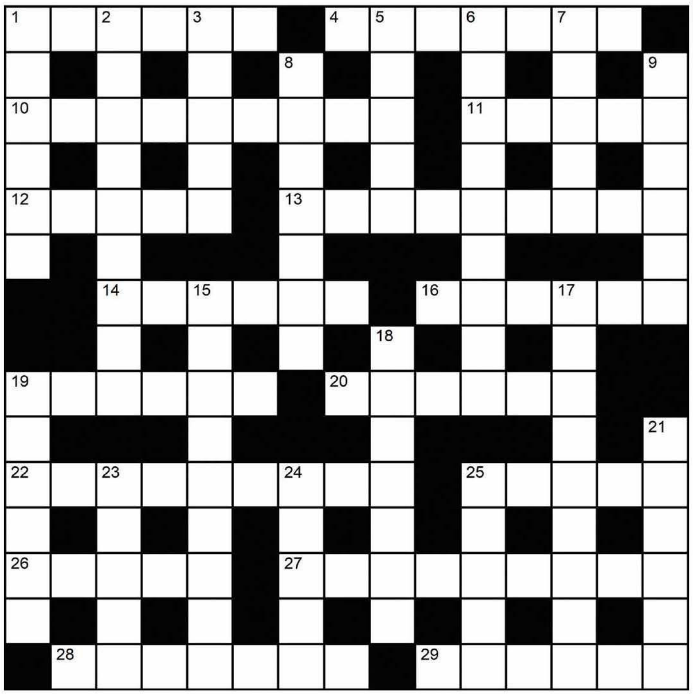
23 For decades, this major country was represented in the UN only by the island of Taiwan (5)

24 Creator of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*; supported Monmouth Rebellion (5)

25 Name of two rulers in Greek legend, one of Corinth and one of Thebes (5)



Who wrote *Robinson Crusoe* – and also supported the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685? *(24 down)*

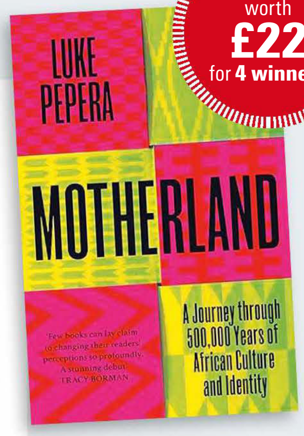


MARIE
REINE
DESCOS

Who was the second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots? *(28 across)*

Compiled by **Eddie James**

Book worth **£22** for **4** winners


LUKE PEPERA
MOTHERLAND
A Journey through 500,000 Years of African Culture and Identity
Few books can lay claim to changing their readers' perceptions so profoundly. A stunning debut.
TRACY BORMAN

Motherland

By Luke Pepera

This groundbreaking exploration of African culture is both a personal journey of discovery into the author's Ghanaian roots and heritage, and a fascinating odyssey across 500,000 years of history. It probes questions of identity and reveals less-known stories that have shaped Africa.

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, April 2025 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to ***April2025@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on 16 April 2025. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the June 2025 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry.

● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our February 2025 crossword

Across 1 Erhard 4 The Weald 10 Christina 11 Rouen 12 Indus 13 Astrolabe 14 Etruria 16 Stalin 19 Ruskin 20 Ravenna 23 Bevin Boys 25 Sinai 26 Rolls 27 Matriarch 28 St Anselm 29 Rhodes

Down 1 Euclid 2 Herodotus 5 Hearth 6/3 Wars of the Roses 7 Aruba 8 Dungeon 9 Titanic 15 Unionists 17 Leningrad 18 Cassatt 19 Roberts 21 Rommel 22 Tithes 24 Villa 25 Smith

Four winners of *The Last Dynasty*:

Kenneth Williams, Cardiff; M Tucker, Chippenham; James Kelly, Ryton; G Wood, Bourne

CROSSWORD COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

● The crossword competition is open to all residents of the UK (& Channel Islands), aged 18 or over, except Immediate Media Company London Limited employees or contractors, and anyone connected with the competition or their direct family members. By entering, participants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions and that their name and county may be released if they win. Only one entry permitted per person. ● The closing date and time is as shown under How to Enter, above. Entries received after that will not be considered. Entries cannot be returned. Entrants must supply full name, address and daytime phone number. Immediate Media Company (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will not publish your personal details or provide them to anyone without permission. Read more about the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/* ● The winning entrants will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. The prize and number of winners will be as shown on the Crossword page. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Immediate Media Company London decision is final and no correspondence relating to the competition will be entered into. The winners will be notified by post within 20 days of the close of the competition. The name and county of residence of the winners will be published in the magazine within two months of the closing date. If the winner is unable to be contacted within one month of the closing date, Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to offer the prize to a runner-up. ● Immediate Media Company London Limited reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions, or to cancel, alter or amend the promotion at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The promotion is subject to the laws of England.

TOPFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

NEXT MONTH

BBC
HISTORY
MAGAZINE

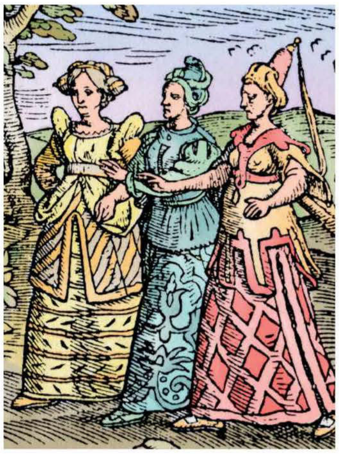
May issue on sale 17 April 2025

Victory in Europe

John Willis describes how ordinary Britons reacted to the defeat of Nazi Germany

Immunity for Pinochet?

Philippe Sands recalls his involvement in the 1998 legal proceedings against the former Chilean dictator



Witch hunts

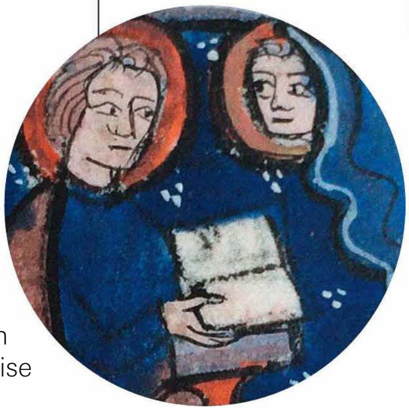
Martha McGill considers why so many more people were executed for witchcraft in Scotland than England

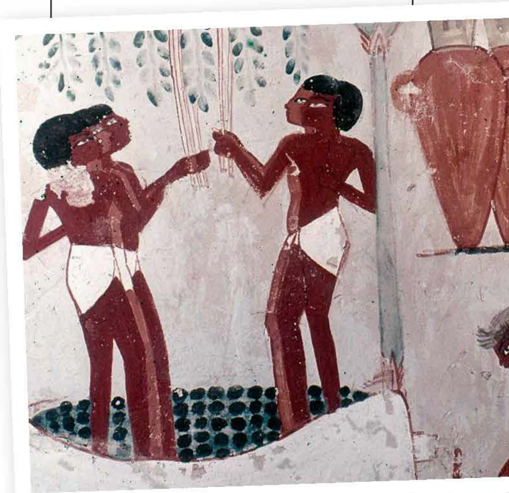
A modern famine

Padraic X Scanlan explores the origins of the great hunger that afflicted Ireland in the mid-19th century

Medieval love story?

Yvonne Seale offers a fresh take on the famous romance between Abelard and Heloise





Ancient Egypt's wine obsession

Islam Issa reveals the role the drink played in the lives of pharaohs and their people

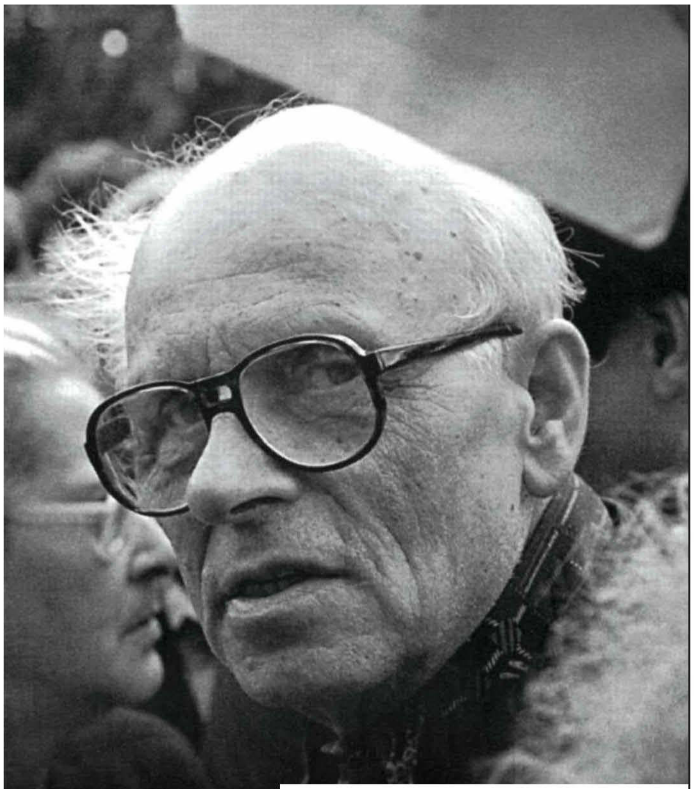
GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO/ALAMY

MY HISTORY HERO

BBC broadcaster ***James Coomarasamy*** *chooses*

Andrei Sakharov

1921–89



Human rights activist Andrei Sakharov at a demonstration in Moscow, 1989. "Speaking out came at great personal cost," says James Coomarasamy

IN PROFILE

Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov was a Soviet physicist and, later, dissident awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1975 for championing human rights around the world. After playing a major part in the development of a Soviet hydrogen bomb, he grew concerned about the moral and political implications of his work. In 1980, he was arrested and exiled by Soviet authorities, and later became prominent in political opposition in the USSR.

> Sakharov used his position in the Soviet elite to try to change the system from within, urging leaders to stop testing nuclear weapons and protect human rights

James Coomarasamy presents *The World Tonight* on BBC Radio 4, *Newshour* on the BBC World Service, and *Ukrainecast* (*bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/p0bqztzm*)

When did you first hear about Sakharov? While I was studying Russian at university in the late 1980s. I spent half a year in Moscow during the Gorbachev era – in fact, I was in the USSR when Sakharov was elected to the Congress of People's Deputies, the Soviet Union's first serious experiment with parliamentary democracy.

What kind of man was he? He was a brilliant scientist from an intellectual family. He tried to join the Red Army during the Second World War but failed his medical. He then became involved in the Soviet project to design an atomic bomb – he's been dubbed 'The father of the hydrogen bomb'. By the 1960s, though, he'd come to the view that the development of nuclear weapons had created the potential for worldwide destruction, and that the lack of individual freedoms in the Soviet Union also posed a danger to global peace.

What made him a hero? Sakharov used his position as a member of the Soviet elite to try to change the system from within, and used his platform to urge Khrushchev and Brezhnev to stop testing nuclear weapons, protect human rights and find ways to peacefully co-exist with the west. Speaking out came at great personal cost: by the 1970s, he was regarded as a dissident and traitor. He was prevented from collecting his Nobel Peace Prize, and was later arrested and exiled to the closed city of Gorky.

Eventually, though, the courage he displayed paid off. Gorbachev, who was clearly influenced by Sakharov, came to understand the need for more democracy and for co-existence between the two great power blocs. Sadly, things have moved backwards in Russia in recent years.

What was his finest hour? Probably his initial decision to stand up against a totalitarian system that had lauded him – and to accept the consequences. All of his later influence at home and abroad stemmed from that decision and from the far-sighted views – linking individual rights with global security – which he developed in the 1960s and which remain relevant in Russia today.

Is there anything you don't particularly admire about him? No. He led an unblemished private life. His first wife died and his second, Yelena Bonner, was his soulmate in the struggle for freedom; he even went on hunger strike to persuade authorities to allow her to travel abroad for medical treatment.

What would you ask Sakharov if you could meet him? I'd love to know what he made of east–west relations today, and of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I'd also ask if he had any advice for those Russians who want their country to pursue a different path. H

Jamie Coomarasamy was talking to York Membery

In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxsb*

GETTY IMAGES

Women's civilian utility dress, © IWM UNI 14405

I am sustainable fashion

You probably know that food was rationed in the Second World War, but did you know that clothes were rationed too? From 1941 to 1949, the number of new garments people could buy was limited due to shortages in material and labour. Sometimes this meant that looking fashionable became difficult.

As availability went down, prices went up, so in 1941 the government put in place the Utility Clothing Scheme, designed to offer consumers a range of well-designed quality and price-controlled clothes that were affordable.

The only problem was, to begin with some utility clothes were rather drab.

Thankfully, the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers stepped in, and top designers were soon submitting their designs for utility clothes. Suddenly dresses like me became things to be seen in, even appearing in British Vogue.

Clothes like me inspired fashion long after the war ended, and our hallmarks of minimalism, sustainability and value for money are still must-haves on the high street today.

IWM
IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS
LONDON

DISCOVER EXTRAORDINARY STORIES AT IWM LONDON

Free entry

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM LONDON

Lambeth North or Elephant & Castle

ancestry

A new perspective on your family story

CENSUS, ENGLAND, 1921.
Prescribed by Regulations under the Census Act ... as the form to be used in England (excluding Monmouth), ... returns in respect of (a) Private Households, (b) Hotels, ... or Common or other Lodging Houses, and (c) Other persons ... whom no other form of schedule is prescribed.
This space to be filled up by the Enumerator.
Registration District.
Enumeration District.
Name of person responsible for making the return.
Postal Address
Name and Surname.
Eith Wilson

©Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division

The 1921 Census of England and Wales is here.

See your ancestor's handwritten entry, and find out where they were living, who they lived with, and what industry they worked in. There are so many new details about your family waiting to be discovered.

Start a 14-day free trial at ancestry.co.uk

One free trial per person. Requires registration with a valid credit or debit card. Unless you cancel before the end of your free trial, your chosen membership will begin and you'll be charged the relevant price. Your membership will automatically renew at the same price at the end of each membership period, unless you are notified otherwise. Terms apply.